



DAN'S BOY

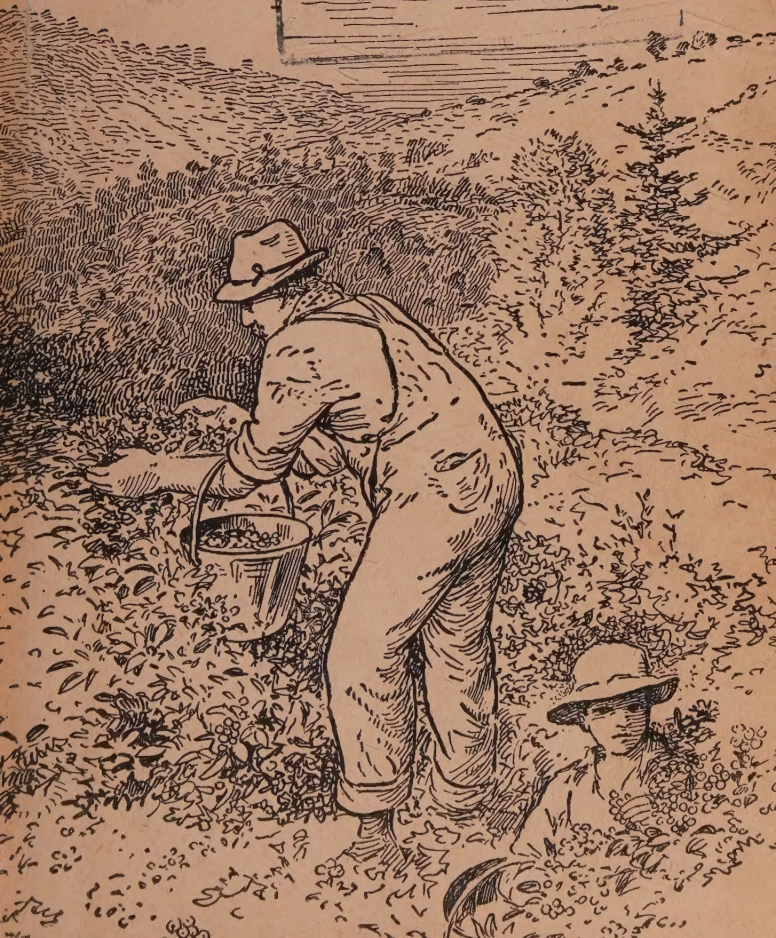
BERTHA B. AND ERNEST COBB

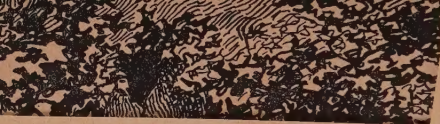




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David caught a big one also

DAN'S BOY

By

BERTHA B. AND ERNEST COBB

Authors of

Arlo, Clematis, Busy Builders' Book,
Who Knows, Pathways, Anita, Allspice,
and other books.

Pictures by L. J. BRIDGMAN



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WHEN we decided to publish our own books in our own way, good friends warned us that the competition of large well-established houses would make our venture impossible. We must confess that we trembled lest this prove true, but we set boldly forth.

Our surprise was no less than our pleasure to find that many we might have feared as competitors became our kindest friends, advisers, and helpers, always glad to see us succeed.

Among these friends is one who from the first has appreciated the Arlo books and the Arlo Plan of Reading for Interpretation, and has done much to insure their success; so it gives us much happiness to inscribe this book to

E. H. KENERSON
of Ginn and Company

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The Mind's Eye

A guide to teaching through the mental picture

Also by ERNEST COBB

One Foot on the Ground

A plea for common sense in Education

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Dog Fight.....	1
II	Beyond the Fence is the World..	17
III	A Bar of Soap to Eat.....	25
IV	The Rough Trail.....	34
V	Dan Martin.....	43
VI	Alden Gets a New Name.....	56
VII	Along the Roadside.....	65
VIII	The Storm.....	80
IX	Rabbit Hollow.....	94
X	A New Home.....	108
XI	The Swimming Lesson.....	121
XII	The Stint.....	134
XIII	David Wins a Battle.....	147
XIV	Gray Days and Gold.....	165
XV	David Goes Shopping.....	171
XVI	Vulcanized.....	186
XVII	Shadows on the Path.....	194
XVIII	The Shadows Grow Deeper....	204
XIX	His Mother's Face.....	213
XX	Danger.....	225
XXI	Who's Boy Are You?.....	236
XXII	Goodby to Rabbit Hollow....	250
XXIII	I Am Santa Claus.....	256
XXIV	Just as David Planned.....	265

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

David caught a big one also	<i>Frontispiece</i>
A sparrow swung on a spray of cedar	<i>Facing page</i> 32
A man was sitting there	" 46
Well, I never!	" 82
Making the fir bed	" 112
Wait a minute	" 124
David caught a big one also	" 166
Come, little raindrop	" 172
Dan Martin was to be janitor	" 216
Dan Martin saved the school	" 238
Chum rushed upon the boy	" 262

DAN'S BOY

CHAPTER I

THE DOG FIGHT

Alden Baker stood under the purple beech tree on his lawn. The day was hot and hazy, and the wind, weary with its long flight from the south, could barely move the leaves that made a deep shade above him.

His cap was off; his shoes were off; his stockings were off; all scattered about on the lawn.

"If it gets any hotter," he said to his dog, Chum, who sat before him on the grass, "I'll take my blouse off, too."

But Chum did not seem to mind the heat. He pushed a ball closer to his little master. Then he wagged his short, stumpy tail, and barked.

“Oh, Chum, it’s too hot to run so fast! You will have a sunstroke.”

“No! No!” barked Chum. He rolled the ball about in the grass at Alden’s feet, and threw it in the air.

“Well then, sic it!” The boy took the ball and threw it down the smooth, sloping lawn.

Chum followed, clawing up the grass in his efforts to catch the rolling ball.

As Alden threw the ball he saw another boy, and another dog, coming down the street. The boy was about his size. He wore a big straw hat, that flopped down over his ears. A cotton shirt, with sleeves rolled up, and a pair of old gray linen pants, completed his dress.

His dog was of no special breed; just mostly dog. He trailed along wearily behind his little master.

As the ball came rolling down the lawn, through the open gate, and into the street, the dog looked up. Here was something interesting. He saw the other dog racing behind it. He could get to that ball first. He knew he could. He did.

This was too much for Chum. That ball was his. Woe to any strange, low-bred cur that dared to touch it! With a warning growl, he flung himself on the stranger.

The strange dog fell backward, and rolled in the dust, surprised by the sudden attack; but he was no coward. Dropping the ball, he rolled up his lips, as a boy would roll up his sleeves, and fastened his teeth in Chum's ear.

Round about, under and over they

tumbled, with growls and snaps and snarls. The air was filled with flying dust and gravel.

The strange lad kicked at Chum with his bare toes, and yelled. This made the dogs fight all the harder.

Alden ran across the lawn, calling to Chum, who was eager to win or die, for his master and his ball.

“Grab your dog, kid, and pull him off, while I grab mine,” called the stranger. He darted in, and seized his dog by a hind leg.

Made bold by his example, Alden reached out and tried to grab Chum’s brass collar.

Poor Alden! he was only seven, and not used to fighting dogs. He missed the collar, and cried aloud with pain. His hand was bleeding.

In the same moment the other boy slipped, and fell into the struggle. He

yelled, and struck at both dogs as he went down into the dust.

Just then the gardener came running across the lawn with a pail of water.

“Stop them, stop them!” called Alden’s mother, running after the gardener.

The gardener was rather afraid of dogs. The growls and snarls and yells and cries excited him. Without waiting, he poured the pail of cold water over dogs and boys together.

That was enough for Chum. He didn’t care much for fighting anyway. The heat, and the loss of the ball, made him begin it.

He was now very cool, and the stranger had dropped the ball; so he went back across the street, still growling a little, to show that he was not afraid of any dog.

The boy, soaked with water, got to

his feet and started off, tears rolling down his face. His dog went after him, looking back and growling at the group behind.

Mrs. Baker came up, almost out of breath. She looked at Alden.

"Are you hurt, dear?"

"No, not much," said Alden, looking down at his legs, that were covered with muddy water.

"Oh, see that boy!" she cried, looking at the other lad. "Come back, boy, come back! You mustn't go away like that!"

The boy turned, but did not stop.

"Boy, boy, come back! You are hurt. Your leg is bitten. We must wash it. I will give you some clean clothes to wear."

The boy did not stop.

"Get him, Rudolph. He must be washed. Bring him back."

The gardener went after the boy, who only moved faster.

"Come back," said Rudolph. "She will give you some cake and candy."

Rudolph knew that cake and candy would turn a boy quicker than the promise of a washing.

"No," said the lad, rubbing his sleeve across his eyes. "I'm all right."

"He won't turn back, marm. I guess he'll be all right. Those boys are tough," said Rudolph.

As they watched, the lad, with water dripping from his clothes, and blood running down his leg, turned the corner and disappeared from sight.

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Baker, "boys are so queer! He may die of blood poison. Come now, Alden, you shall have a nice bath."

Then she saw the blood on Alden's hand.

"Why, you were bitten too! Oh, you dear little boy! You were sure to get into trouble, just when I was so busy!"

"Why, what were you doing?"

"Never mind what I was doing. Rudolph, tell Mary to call Doctor Clark on the telephone, and have him come right away, and get a bath ready, with salts in it."

Mary ran across the lawn, and into the house, followed by Chum, who thought this was a new game.

"Oh, ma, I don't need a bath! I'm all right." Alden tried to pull away.

"Be a good little boy now, Alden. Don't worry mother. You must have a bath this very minute."

She stopped to fan herself with Alden's hat, that she took from the grass under the tree.

Mary came to the door.

"Is the bath ready, Mary? Did you call Doctor Clark? Can he come at once?"

"Yes, marm, no, marm," said Mary.

"Yes, marm, no, marm? Yes, no, what?"

"Well, marm, I called Doctor Clark, and he is out. I said to have him come down as soon as he came in."

"Oh, dear, I hope he won't be long! Now take Alden and see that he has a bath in hot water, with plenty of soap. Alden, I do get so tired of giving you baths! You get dirty ten times a day. You should live in a tub!"

Mary dragged Alden to the bathroom, while Mrs. Baker went to rest a little, before the doctor came.

Mary set the water running, and went out to get some towels.

"Now hurry," she said, "and don't whine. It won't take long."

When she came back, Alden was all ready for his bath.

“I hurried, Mary, as fast as I could.”

“That’s a good boy. Why, where is the soap?”

There was no soap.

“Oh, never mind! I had lots of soap this morning. Please, now, Mary.”

“Oh, well, hurry along! I guess you are not very dirty.”

So Alden had a soapless bath, and a quick one.

When he was nearly dressed again, Mary returned to her work in the kitchen, folding the clothes.

Alden laced his shoes, and brushed his hair. Then he reached behind the bathtub, and took out a dusty cake of soap. He put it in the soap tray, and started out again to play with Chum.

The bell rang as he went down stairs. It was Doctor Clark.

"Oh, Doctor, I'm so glad you have come!" said Mrs. Baker, running to the door. "We have had such a dreadful time. Dog fights, dog bites. My nerves are nearly gone."

"Oh, ho! Was Alden bitten?"

"Yes, show Doctor Clark your hand, dear."

Alden held up his hand.

"My, my! Where is the wound?"

Doctor Clark took the little hand, smiling. Then his smile died out.

The hole, made by a sharp tooth, had almost closed; but a tiny red line ran just under the skin, up under his sleeve toward the elbow.

Doctor Clark rolled up Alden's sleeve. The red line ran up above the elbow, almost to his shoulder.

The Doctor moved his finger up and down the red line. "Does it hurt?" he asked.

"No."

"Good! Now we will clean it."

"I just had a bath," said Alden, pulling back.

"You do look clean, sure enough, but we had better make certain."

He turned to Mrs. Baker. "A little clean water is all I need."

Alden watched with wide eyes, while the Doctor opened his bag and took out a roll of absorbent cotton, a roll of gauze, some bottles, and a queer pair of scissors.

He poured some liquid into the water, and washed the skin around the wound. From another bottle he took yellow iodine, and wet the skin where he had washed it.

"This iodine may sting a bit, but a brave boy like you won't mind that," he said.

The iodine burned like fire, and

Alden nearly cried, but he kept his teeth together, and held back the cry.

“That’s the boy! Now we’ll just bind it up a little.” He wound the gauze about his wrist, and part of his arm above the wrist.

“Now, Alden, if you promise not to run or play, I’ll let you stay up; but the first time you run, or jump, or do any stunts, into bed you go. Is that a bargain?”

“Yes,” said Alden, who would even take a bath rather than go to bed.

“Is it dangerous, Doctor?” asked the mother. “Had I better phone for Mr. Baker?”

“That red line shows a little poison in the wound, but nothing to fear as yet,” said Doctor Clark. “Now let us take a look at Master Chum.”

Chum was under a pear tree. He was just finishing a bath himself, and

had licked off all the dust and water from his sleek brown coat.

Seeing the people coming toward him, he jumped up with a bark, picked up a stone nearby, and ran to meet them with the stone in his mouth.

Doctor Clark was an old friend of his, so he stopped before him, dropped the stone at his feet, and stood back, looking up, with one front paw in the air, alert and ready.

Doctor Clark looked down at him, silent.

At this, Chum picked up the stone again, dropped it on the Doctor's clean boot, stood back, and barked.

"Oh, is he mad, do you think?" asked Mrs. Baker.

"Not half so mad as I shall be, if he drops that stone on my foot again," said the Doctor.

"Go lie down, Chum. You need

rest and quiet; no stones to chase today, old boy."

"Now then," he went on. "What about that other dog, and that other boy? Who are they?"

"Did you know the boy, Alden?" asked Mrs. Baker.

Alden thought a minute.

"I think he was Dan Martin's boy," he said.

"I guess that's just who he was. You know Dan Martin, Doctor. He is the queer old fellow that does odd jobs. He is a little wrong in his head, but is a kind old man, and the children all like him."

"I have seen him about. The boy has no mother, if I am not mistaken. Well, I must look after that boy, and that dog, too. This is bad weather for dog fights and dog bites. Now, Alden, you just keep cool."

So Doctor Clark packed up his bag again and went away, leaving Alden to wonder how he could keep cool on such a hot day.

CHAPTER II

BEYOND THE FENCE IS THE WORLD

"Well, how is our expert dog trainer today? All well again?"

Doctor Clark walked over the lawn to the seat under the pear tree, where Alden was playing with a new engine his father had brought from Boston.

"They couldn't give me a bath, because it would wet my bandage," Alden replied.

"That is very sad. Let me look at the arm."

Doctor Clark felt up and down the arm he had put the bandage on.

"Does it hurt?"

"No, but my hand is stiff," said Alden.

The red line was gone, and the wound was closed.

"That's the boy! You don't need a doctor any more."

"Well, I think I had better keep the bandage on," replied Alden. "I mustn't get any dirt in the bite."

"Very wise, very wise, indeed! Day after tomorrow is Saturday. How would it do if you kept on the bandage till Saturday, and had a real bath Saturday night?"

"Mother, Mother!" called Alden to Mrs. Baker, who came across the lawn. "I must keep the bandage on till Saturday night. I can have a bath then, when I take it off."

"Oh, hush, Alden! You would rather live in a pig pen than be a nice clean boy. How is he, Doctor?"

"Well enough, so far as I can see. You won't need me here again."

“Doctor, what about that other boy? Is he all right too?”

Doctor Clark frowned.

“We couldn’t find Dan Martin’s boy yesterday. There is no mother, and the neighbors knew little about him. Now that school is closed, he spends half his time swimming in the river, and the other half picking berries.”

“Did his father know about it?”

“Yes, Dan Martin promised to keep the boy and dog in, for us to look over, but Dan has a bad memory. Poor chap, he knows about enough to smile at poverty, and that is all.

“I hope I can see him today,” he added, as he turned to go, “for a bad bite on a dirty little leg might prove serious in this weather.”

Mrs. Baker watched him go. Then she turned to Alden, and kissed him.

“You lucky little boy! You have

a lovely home and good care. Think of that poor child alone and lonely, dirty and in rags."

"He never has to take a bath. He just goes in swimming," replied Alden. "Say, mother, can I go picking berries?"

"Dear me, what an idea! You can have all the berries you want right at home, all nice and clean. Come, dear, it is time to take your nap."

"Mother, couldn't I have my nap here under this tree? I could sleep better here in the grass."

"What an idea! Come right along now, and don't bother Mother, when she is busy."

"Why, what are you doing?"

"Alden Baker, will you go in and take your nap like a good boy, or shall I have to call Mary?"

So Alden dragged his feet indoors, to lie down and pretend to sleep.

Alden was large and strong for his age. He longed to run away and play with the other children, but his mother treasured her only son. It made her nervous to have him out of the yard an hour at a time.

Friday and Saturday were hard days for Alden. He had to stay quietly in the shade with his toys, for fear his arm might be worse.

On Saturday his bandage was taken off, and even his mother could find no wound that standing on his head might hurt in any way.

"That is no reason, dear," she said, "why you should try to kill yourself. Do be a good boy and go easy."

"Oh, don't worry about me!" said Alden. "Come on, Chum, we'll have a game of ball. No, whoa, stop! Here comes Father.

"Father, say, Father, can I go after

blueberries? You know you said I ought to be of some use. I could earn lots of money picking berries, and could buy all my own clothes, and that would be a help."

"Well, you are almost large enough to go after berries," said Father. "I used—"

"Now, John Baker," Mother broke in, "if you say another word about what you used to do, I'll pack my trunk. You know all things have changed since you were a boy."

"I think you will pack your trunk anyway."

"Why, what do you mean?"

Father reached into his pocket, and took out a yellow envelope.

"Your sister is very ill, and wants to see us. I suppose we ought to go to Washington."

"Go to Washington? How can I

go to Washington, with Alden just over his hurt? He ought not to travel in such weather."

"Alden doesn't have to go. Mary will take good care of him. She and Julia can run the house."

"Oh, yes, it is so easy to talk! You know I never leave him."

"Do you plan to go to school and college with him? He is old enough to get on by himself a few days, aren't you, Alden?"

"I'll say I am!" Alden declared. "Come on, Chum, come on, Chum!"

He rushed across the lawn, and lay flat on the grass. Chum ran and shoved his cold wet nose into his face.

He put his arms round the dog's head and pulled it down close.

"Mother has got to go away," he whispered. "I know where there are some big blueberries, lots of them."

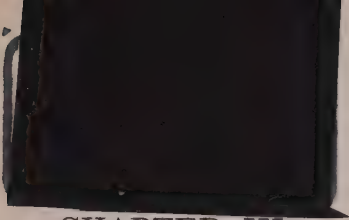
He listened as his father and mother talked of the trip.

"You know," his mother said, "that Mary went down town last time I was away, and left Alden all alone."

"Well, Mary didn't understand just what you wanted. She has always kept her word. If she makes a promise, I know she will keep her word, and do just as she says."

"Oh, dear, I do hope we sha'n't have to stay long!" said Mother.

"She is going. She is going, Chum," whispered Alden. "I know just the place where the boys go swimming."



CHAPTER III

A BAR OF SOAP TO EAT

During the next day Mrs. Baker hoped that something might happen to keep her at home, while Alden watched the trunk and bags with eager eyes, as the packing went on.

"I wish Mother could take you too, dear," said Mrs. Baker, as Alden stood watching her pack the top tray of the trunk with gloves and laces.

Alden said nothing.

"Won't you be lonely here without Mother?"

"No, I'll be all right."

"That's a brave boy. I guess you will be all right, after all. Mary has promised to take good care of you,

and I a [redacted] st as she
says aft

“Oh, [redacted]” replied
Alden, rushing out to meet Father,
who was coming up the walk.

The next day the packing was done;
the taxi came to the door, and Mother
and Father said goodby.

“Be sure, Mary, not to let Alden
out of the yard without you,” called
Mother, as the motor started away.

The hot spell still continued, and
Alden wandered into the yard, to sit
with Chum in the shade, and look
longingly up the street to the open
fields away to the west.

“I know I could find some big
berries, Chum, lots of big berries. I
could take my sand pail and fill it.
I guess Mary would be glad to have
some blueberries for supper.”

“Come, Alden, it is time to have

your nap." Mary's voice sounded from the porch.

"You just wait till I get big, Chum. I'll never take another nap, you see if I do," he said, as he dragged across the soft grass to the house.

Alden was not sleepy, and as he lay on the couch in his room he could hear Mary and Julia talking, on the porch.

"Oh, I'm thirsty," said Mary. "Let's go down and get an ice cream."

"I'd like to, but we'll catch it if we do."

"Why?" asked Mary. "How will anybody know?"

"Alden will probably tell his mother just as soon as she gets home. He told on you last time you left the place when they were away.

"He did, did he, the little tattler? Well, now I'm going to tell you, Julia," said Mary, in an angry voice, "that

I'll fix that little tattletale when I catch him. I'll make him eat a whole bar of laundry soap. I guess that will keep his tongue quiet for a while."

Alden turned pale. A whole bar of laundry soap!

"Oh, well, let's go! He's fast asleep, and we shall be back in ten minutes."

"Wait a minute. I'll see if he is really asleep."

Alden heard steps on the piazza. He closed his eyes, as he had learned to do so well when they called him in the morning.

When Mary looked in, he lay quiet, and seemed fast asleep.

The door closed. He heard footsteps going down the walk.

Alden arose, trembling. He looked through the window. The girls were almost round the corner.

A whole bar of laundry soap! Once

Alden had tasted a tiny bit, and it nearly strangled him. Mary was going to make him eat a whole bar.

"She will, if she catches me," he said to himself. "She said she would, and Father told Mother she would do exactly as she said."

Alden waited a minute, to be sure the girls were out of sight. Then he ran out into the yard. He got his sand pail, and ran to the gate.

Chum was chained in his kennel. He whined, and tried to follow.

Alden choked back a sob.

"No, Chum, you can't come. I am going a long way, and I am never coming back."

He slammed the gate behind him, and ran up the street, away from stores and houses, toward the open fields.

He hurried along, turning into a shady street, and stopped at last, to

catch his breath, under a great elm tree that shaded the road.

A path led from the street into some bushes. It was straight and soft and cool, with grass along the edges.

Alden turned into the path, and was soon out of sight of streets and houses. Before long he came to an open space, where the path led along a ridge, with straight banks, sloping down on each side to the level ground.

"Oh, I know! This is the aqueduct," he said, as he trotted along the smooth path on the ridge.

The sun was hot, and the blue jacket he wore seemed very heavy.

"I'll just take it off and hide it," he said. "I sha'n't need it this hot weather."

So he took off his coat and stuffed it carefully into a pipe that drained water under the aqueduct in wet weather.

He felt lighter and cooler then, and walked along faster, swinging his pail as he went.

“I know I shall find some blueberries 'round here,” he said. “This is the place for them.”

Now a new trouble began to disturb him. His feet were sore, and his tan shoes hurt him.

Just then he looked down. The aqueduct led across the river. By the shore some children were playing in the water.

As Alden watched them, they picked up their things and started across the meadow on their way home.

The grass on the bank was soft and green. The water was clear and cool. He waited no longer, but hurried down and took off his shoes and stockings.

The minute his feet touched the cool water, the pain was soothed, and the

chill of the stream ran all over his little body.

Quiet and refreshed, Alden sat on a stone, while water ran over his feet.

A song sparrow swung on a spray of cedar beside him, and peeped slyly down, as it burst into a song ten times bigger than its tiny body.

A school of minnows darted like silver sunbeams here and there in the clear water.

On the quiet surface, little breezes ran about like elfin children playing at tag.

Puff! A ripple would run almost to the lily pads by the shore.

Puff! A ruffle would scamper across to the cardinal flower under the dark green ferns, making fifty red cardinal flowers dance and quiver in the waves.

Puff! A ripple raced over the quiet pool, straight to his feet.



A sparrow swung on a spray of cedar

Alden looked about. He was cool, happy, contented, and laughed at the sparrow in the cedar tree.

He sat there some minutes, digging his pink toes into the soft sand. Then he noticed something creeping slowly up toward his bare feet.

He started suddenly, and came out of the day dream that had filled his mind with fairy fancies.

A moment before, he had been in a little heaven, a heaven of water and birds and breezes. Now he was a lonely boy again, timid and afraid.

Slowly moving toward his bare feet, across the quiet water, was creeping a dark, silent shadow.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROUGH TRAIL

When Alden saw the dark shadow reaching almost to his feet, he looked up. The shade was growing deeper under the beech trees across the river. The sun was swinging down behind the tall trees on the other bank.

"I must be going," said Alden. "I didn't know it was so late."

His feet and legs were stiff and lame, as he rose from the stone, so he rubbed them with his hands a minute.

His shoes and stockings were there by the water, but he did not put them on again.

"I don't want shoes. They hurt my feet so," he said to himself. "All the

boys that go swimming and picking berries, go barefoot.”

So he left his shoes and stockings, and walked over the soft grass, up to the path along the aqueduct.

When he reached the top, Alden turned and looked back. There, down the path he had followed, was his pleasant yard, his dog, his cool room, and a good supper.

There also was a cake of laundry soap. Alden could stand pain. If Mary pinched him, or pulled his hair, he would not be afraid. Even if she threatened to snip off his ears, as one maid had threatened to do, he might dare to return.

But a cake of laundry soap—a whole bar! He knew he should die from that; and death from eating soap was too terrible to think of.

So Alden turned to the west, and

walked along the path, still swinging his sand pail, as he went onward.

For a while he felt cool and light and happy. At first the path of brown earth was smooth and pleasant to his tender toes.

But there were rough spots in the path, and his bare feet, strangers to earth and gravel, found this sudden meeting more than they could bear.

They began to sting and smart, as Alden hobbled along, moving from the earth to the grass, and back again, seeking smooth spots in the path for his weary steps.

“That is a good place to rest,” he thought, as he passed a spot where bushes and low trees ran back into a large pasture.

He got under the fence and went over to a small maple tree that shaded a patch of sweet fern and tall grass.

Here he sank down, and wished that he had a cool stream to bathe his smarting feet.

Alden had missed his nap that day. He had started up at the sound of Mary's voice, and hurried away, full of fear and anger.

Now he was faint and dizzy.

He sat down beneath the maple tree, and rested his head against the cool, smooth bark.

"I said I should never take a nap again," he thought, "but I think I might like just a little teeny one."

He closed his eyes. The soft breeze stirred the maple leaves about him, and cooled his cheek.

A cricket sang, "Sleep, sleep, sleep," under an old stump near his foot.

His head drooped, and he was almost asleep, when the pain in his legs and the ache in his back roused him.

Alden straightened up, and opened his eyes wide. For a moment he stared about, still half asleep, then he rose suddenly to his feet.

All his weariness was forgotten. He no longer felt sleepy, but very wide awake.

“Oh, I knew it, I knew it! Didn’t I tell you so?” he almost shouted.

He reached down and grasped his pail, and skipped through the bushes of sweet fern, to a spot forty or fifty feet away from his maple tree.

There stood a tall bush, covered with large blueberries. They were so thick he could pick them almost by the handful.

Plunk, plunk, plinkity plink. The berries fell into his sand pail. When he had the bottom well covered, he sat down and ate them all.

Nothing had ever tasted half so

delicious to Alden as those berries. He was thirsty, and they quenched his thirst. He was hungry, too, and they satisfied his hunger.

When they were eaten, he started picking again, and soon had his pail half full. The bush was picked clean, except for one branch that hung low, partly hidden in the tall grass.

"I'll just eat those now," said Alden, "and save these in the pail for supper."

So he set down his pail a little way off, and then raised the branch to pick the berries.

Suddenly he heard a strange sound, a buzz and a hum, that sounded like his father's motor car.

Then there came a pain in his cheek, as if some one were driving a red hot pin through his face.

Poor Alden yelled, and slapped his face. He could see a cloud of black

insects flying about his head. They were hornets.

They had built their house under the low branch, in the tall grass.

“Oh! Ow!” yelled Alden, and he rushed away, through the tall grass and sweet fern. Straight toward his low maple tree he ran, and burst through the thick leaves into the dark shade beneath the tree.

He could not have done better. The hornets flew about, planning to follow, and sting him again, but when they came to the leaves of the maple tree they stopped, buzzing angrily about, looking for the burglar who had broken into their quiet home.

They could not see him there, sitting under the low branches, so they flew around a few minutes, and then went back to mend their broken house.

Alden sat still as a robin on her nest,

till the buzzing stopped. The pain burned his cheek, and the flesh began to swell under his eye.

Then Alden did something he had not done for a long time. He began to cry.

He rubbed the sting, and mixed the tears with the dust on his face.

"I wish I had a hammer, and I'd smash every one of those old bees to jelly," he declared, as he stopped his tears, and made one grand wipe with the sleeve of his blouse across his face.

Then he rose and peeped out from under the leaves. The hornets were gone. There on the ground near the bush was his pail of berries.

"You won't have those berries, anyway," he said. He stooped down and stole carefully over to the spot where the pail was standing.

He watched and listened. He saw

a few hornets flying over their nest. He heard a low hum as they gathered in the tall grass.

As Alden grasped his pail he saw a strong stick lying on the ground.

"I could kill them with that stick as well as with my hammer," he said. "But perhaps I ought not to hurt them. I don't believe they knew I only made a mistake."

He felt the lump on his cheek and decided not to hurt them; so he took his pail firmly in his hand, stuck out his tongue at the hornets, crawled under the fence, and started once more on his way.

CHAPTER V

DAN MARTIN

As Alden walked toward the setting sun, he felt half sad, half joyful. His feet hurt worse than ever. His face burned and throbbed, where the hornets had stung him. This made him sad.

His pail was half full of big blueberries. He had been wading all by himself. These two dreams had been fulfilled in the same afternoon, and this made him joyful.

The shadows were growing longer. The air, blowing in a light breeze from the north, grew cooler. As he hopped along on his tender feet, like a wounded bird, in the shadow of some large elm trees, he wished he had his coat.

He remembered that he had left his cap in the bushes. It fell off when he ran from the hornets, and he had not thought of it again.

He shivered.

Hunger grew sharper as the minutes passed.

“Pretty soon,” he said to himself, “I will sit down and eat some berries for supper.”

He tried to be brave, but the thought of supper turned his mind back to the dining room at home, where Mary would be putting on his plate.

He would have the yellow plate with Jack and Jill all around the edge. He would have his blue pitcher, full of rich milk, and toast, and graham crackers, and butter, and jam, and a slice of yellow cheese.

For dessert he would have chocolate cake. He knew that he would have

chocolate cake, for he had seen Julia make one that morning.

Yes, all these would be waiting for a hungry, weary boy; and also there would be waiting a bar of laundry soap for him to eat.

“I’ll die if I’ve got to die; and I guess I shall,” he said, choking back a sob. “But I won’t die from eating soap.”

So he trudged on again with fresh courage toward the setting sun.

But hunger and pain and weariness were fast becoming more than he could bear. The cold, also, made him shiver, as he went into the shadows.

The pail of berries, that had brought him so much joy, now hung heavy in his little hand.

Looking ahead, he could see a great elm that rose high in the golden air of sunset.

Its giant roots spread apart as they came from the ground, making arms and a back, like the chairs in his father's study.

The grass beneath looked thick and soft and green, and the sun fell warm and bright under sweeping branches.

"There," said Alden. "I will rest under that tree, and eat some blueberries from my pail."

He hastened toward the tree, and almost reached it, when he started back. He turned around, as if to run away; then stopped, and looked again.

A man was sitting there, half hidden by the giant roots. His hat was off; the slanting sunbeams touched his soft gray hair with gold.

His face was brown and wrinkled, but kind and gentle, as he sat silent, looking far down the valley, through the arching trees.



A man was sitting there

Alden stood still a moment, wondering what to do. Then his tin pail struck upon the buckle at his knee.

The man started, and looked up. As Alden saw him thus, he remembered his brown, wrinkled face.

It was Dan Martin, the father of the boy who used to pass his house.

Dan Martin stared at him a moment, and rubbed his hand across his eyes, and stared again.

A strange, eager light burned in his eyes. Alden remembered that they said he was crazy. He looked so now, his mouth half open, staring at him as if he were a spirit flown from fairy land.

"Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?" he suddenly asked, reaching out toward Alden.

"Are you my boy? You must be my boy. Tell me, are you my little boy?"

Alden was afraid. What should he

say? The man wanted him to say yes. What would he do if Alden said no?

Again the man reached toward him, rising to his feet.

"Are you my boy? Are you my little boy?" he asked, trembling as he spoke.

"Yes," said Alden.

"Oh, I knew it! I knew you were my boy, my David. They told me you were dead. I knew they were telling me lies.

"My boy David would never die from a dog bite. I knew he wouldn't.

"They said he was dead, and gave me his clothes. See, they are here in this bundle. If he was really dead, what did I want of his clothes?

"They were wicked people to tell me such a story; but I never believed them, not I. Dan Martin knows too much for that."

At first, as the man talked, he was

much excited; but he grew more quiet as he drew Alden close beside him, and held his little hand.

"See, Davie," he said, when he was calm once more, "you need your coat and your cap. It is cold tonight.

"You will want your shoes and stockings too, your feet are cut. See, I have them all here in the bundle."

Dan Martin drew the boy down beside him, and opened the bundle. There was a gray jacket, and pants to match, a gray cap with a visor, and a pair of black shoes and stockings.

"Put on the cap and the jacket," said the man.

He held the coat. It was rather large, but it was soft and warm, and Alden buttoned it across his chest with a sigh of satisfaction.

"You have grown smaller since you were sick," said Dan Martin, looking

at him with troubled eyes, "but you will soon grow large again."

When Alden put on the cap, he reached for the stockings. He longed to cover his aching feet.

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute." Dan Martin pulled the stockings away, and began to fumble in his pockets.

"I have something good for little boys, and little feet."

Alden watched him, wondering what he might bring out. At last he drew forth a small bundle, wrapped in brown paper that was neatly folded.

"This is it. This is the stuff," said Dan Martin, with a happy smile, as he began to unwrap the bundle.

When he had taken off the paper, he held up, for Alden to see, a small cake of soap.

"What's the matter? Are you afraid of it?" he said, as Alden drew back.

“No-n-o,” said Alden. “Do I have to take a bath?”

“Not now, not now. You come over here with me, and I’ll show you.”

Alden drew back, afraid, keeping his eye on the soap.

“Don’t fear Dan Martin, that’s a good boy. Come now, you’ll be glad when you see what I am going to do for your little feet.”

Dan Martin smiled, and reached out to take Alden’s hand. The boy was afraid. He did not know what was to happen next. But the man’s smile was so kind, and his voice was so soft, that he took his hand, and followed him down a narrow path, that led through the grass into some willow trees just beyond.

As they reached the willows, he heard a sound that made him glad. He no longer dragged back. This was

what he had longed for. He heard the sound of water, gurgling and splashing through the willow trees.

A brook ran across the path right before them. It came down from a pasture above, through a bed of ferns. Then it plunged over a rock, and scampered along over mossy stones and white pebbles, until it ran out of sight in the alder bushes below.

“Here, David,” said Dan Martin; “sit on this moss, and put your feet in the water.”

Alden didn't wait to be told twice. In another second his hot, aching feet were paddling in the cold, bubbling water of the brook.

Dan Martin sat beside him, and held up first one foot and then the other, rubbing it all over with the soap, and then rinsing it off in the fresh water.

“Left foot, right foot, then a stocking, next a boot.”

Dan Martin laughed as he dried the feet, now pink and white, by waving them in the air. He pulled on the stockings, and next the boots.

Alden had been glad to get his tan shoes off, down there by the river; but he was twice as glad now to get these black shoes and stockings to protect his sore feet.

“Now,” said the man, taking off Alden’s coat, “you take the soap and wash your hands way up to the elbows, and your face all over. There is soap enough for your neck too. It is wonderful soap, French soap. I had it for Christmas.”

When Alden had washed his face, Dan Martin brought from another pocket a small towel. With this he wiped the boy’s face and hands.

While he did this, Alden noticed how clean Dan Martin's hands and face were. His clothes were clean. His face and hands were rough and wrinkled; so were his clothes; but his skin was clean and his clothes were neat.

"Now," said Dan Martin, as they walked back to the elm tree, "you will feel as cozy as a sparrow in a blue bird's nest."

"I'm hungry," said Alden.

"Hungry? Why, of course, of course! It is time for supper. It is getting dark. I forgot about eating today, but now I shall eat.

"Ah, you have blueberries," he went on. "That is good. I will get some food too, and we shall have a feast."

Alden watched the man as he felt in his pockets.

"Here it is. Here is some money," he said, holding up a coin. "Now you

wait right here till I come back. I shall be back in almost no time. You will stay right here, won't you?"

"Yes," said Alden, who could hardly have moved a dozen steps, even at the sight of Mary with a bar of laundry soap.

CHAPTER VI

ALDEN GETS A NEW NAME

When Dan Martin started down the path across the brook, Alden sat in the forked roots of the elm tree, where he could look across the valley toward the setting sun.

His face glowed in the fresh, cool breeze. His feet and legs were warm and comfortable, after the bath with the cold water and the Christmas soap.

Alden closed his eyes a moment in a drowsy way. Then he started up. He heard a rustle in the bushes near the brook, beside the path.

Peeping round the tree, he watched the place where the path led in.

The head and face of Dan Martin

appeared through the willows. He saw Alden, sitting in his place.

"Oh, there you are!" he said. "I thought I had better come back to make sure you were still here."

He turned and hastened into the willows. Alden could hear his rapid steps as he hurried away.

"I hope he will get back soon," the boy said to himself. "I can't wait much longer for my supper."

He did return, even sooner than Alden expected. His face was red, and he breathed hard, as if he had been running.

"Here you are. I knew you would be here. My boy wouldn't fly away again and leave me all alone. I know he wouldn't."

Dan Martin smiled, and patted Alden on the head, as he set down two bundles, and an empty tomato can.

“Now we will have a grand supper in almost less than no time. Did you ever taste blueberry toast?”

Alden shook his head.

“Ah, it is a treat! With your big berries we can make a lot.”

He took a stone and made the edges of the tomato can smooth.

“Now take this down to the brook,” he said, “and wash it all out clean, while I build a fire and get the toast started over the coals.”

Alden went down to the brook, and splashed the water round and round in the can. Then he took it back to Dan Martin, who was breaking small dry branches to feed a fire.

The fire sent up a curl of white smoke from three large stones, which he had placed near the elm tree.

Dan Martin looked into the can. He frowned.

"Here, boy, that isn't half cleaned. You take that back and use some sand. Polish it all round as clean as a yellow bird's bill."

Alden was tired and hungry. No one had ever dreamed of telling him to wash dishes.

He took the can and looked into it.

"I won't," he said. "That's clean enough now."

"What did you say?" asked Dan Martin. There was a quiver in his voice.

"I said I won't wash it any more," said Alden. "It's clean enough." There was a little quiver in his voice.

Suddenly he was lifted from his feet. The big brown hands of Dan Martin seized him by the waist.

He gasped with fright, and was just about to cry out, "I'll do it! I'll do it!" when Dan Martin's arms went round him, and pressed him close.

“Ah, now I know you are my boy!” he cried. “That is just what little David always said when he was stuffy. You seemed so changed that I was afraid it might not be you, after all.”

He gave Alden a hug, and set him down again.

“After all, I guess you will wash it clean. Who wants to eat from nasty dishes?”

“Yes, I will,” said Alden, still trembling, as he started back to the brook.

This time he took some sand, and scrubbed the tin round and round, till it was as bright as a pigeon’s eye.

When he returned, a bed of coals glowed in the fireplace; and Dan Martin was toasting a slice of bread, stuck on the end of a stick of green wood.

“That’s the boy for me. Now fill it half full of water, and we will boil it out,” said Dan.

The can was placed in the bright coals, where it soon began to hiss and sputter. Then Dan Martin took two tin plates and two spoons, and washed them in the boiling water.

He threw the water out, and poured in blueberries till the can was full.

Next he opened a small bag and poured some sugar over the berries.

"Now I'll just add a little water, and we can have a feast," he said.

In two seconds, or perhaps three, he was back from the brook, and the can was placed again on the glowing coals, against the rocks.

By the time he had toasted two more slices of bread, the berries were boiling in the can.

Placing a slice of toast on a tin plate, Dan Martin poured some of the blueberries over it, and passed it to Alden.

"All aboard, skipper," he said. "There is more just like that, when the plate is clean; only don't get too much in your ears."

Alden had never been so hungry in his life. He took a spoon and tasted the blueberry toast. Then he hurried to taste a larger piece.

"It must be all right," said the man, with his kindly smile. "It goes down as easy as a bucket in a well."

"How many slices can I have?" asked Alden.

"Oh, five or six, if you can find the room for them."

"Is that all?" Alden replied, holding out an empty plate.

So under the friendly elm they sat, the queer man and the runaway boy, and ate their supper side by side.

"There now," said Dan Martin, when Alden had stuffed in the last crumb

that he could hold. "We have berries enough left for breakfast.

"Here, take the soap and wash your hands, and the front of your face. Your ears are clean enough."

While Alden washed his face, Dan Martin washed the plates and spoons, and put more wood on the fire.

"Now, Davie," he said, "we can sleep right here in the kitchen, with a roof made of the very best elm wood.

"See what I have in here," he added, taking a bundle that lay beside the tree. He removed the paper and showed Alden a heavy gray blanket.

"With some ferns for a pillow, and this blanket over us, we can sleep like two turtles in a sand bank."

Dan Martin brought an armful of ferns from the brook, laid the towel across them to form a pillow, and placed the blanket so the two could

lie snug between the elm roots, on the soft grass.

Alden lay down, with his head on the pillow of fragrant ferns, while Dan Martin lay beside him, and drew up the thick, warm blanket.

The night was nearly come. A cool breeze gently stirred the branches of the elm. The day was hushed, but for belated birds. A pale star twinkled in the eastern sky. His eyelids drooped.

“Good-night, sleep tight, my boy.”

“Good-night,” said Alden, in a dreamy voice. He watched the star, and listened to the birds. Then little Alden Baker sank to sleep, to rise Dan Martin’s boy.

CHAPTER VII

ALONG THE ROADSIDE

A chorus of bird voices woke David Martin the next day at dawn.

He sat up and looked about him with sleepy eyes. Dan Martin was already up, stirring the ashes in the fireplace with a green stick.

The towel that had covered his pillow of ferns, and a big red handkerchief, hung over a little pine tree, drying in the rays of the rising sun.

"Hello, there is Davie, up with the birds," cried Dan Martin. "You wait just a minute, and I'll give you a bath. I took mine in the brook, but you will want warm water; you always did."

"I took a bath yesterday," said David, with a little shiver.

"Took a bath yesterday?"

"Well, I washed my feet and legs. You washed them yourself before we ate our supper."

"That isn't a bath. A cat is cleaner than that. Dirt is poison. You wait and see how spry you feel. I'll use some of my Christmas soap."

David lay back on the ferns with a groan. He was stiff and lame. He looked to see if the wound on his hand might have opened, to save him from a bath; but his hand showed only the red scar, where the wound had been.

Dan Martin blew a red coal into a blaze, piled on a few dry twigs, and set the tomato can, full of water, on the snapping fire.

"Now, boy," he said, as the water began to boil, "we'll make you feel

like a new lamb in a bed of May buttercups."

He mixed the hot water with cold water in the sand pail, and took the red handkerchief for a wash cloth.

"Now then," he added, "ready on your mark, set, go."

He lifted David from the bed, and held him deftly between his knees.

"There now," he said, when the bath was finished, "didn't that feel good?"

David lifted first one leg and then the other. Most of the lameness was gone, and a warm glow covered his body, from head to foot.

"Yes, I feel pretty good," the boy replied, "but—"

"But what?"

"I didn't clean my teeth."

"Oh, well, do you have to clean little white teeth like yours? Did the doctor tell you to clean them?"

"They feel rough and fuzzy if I don't clean them every day."

"I haven't any toothbrush. I never thought of that."

"Oh, well, we can buy one!" said the boy, cheerfully.

"Yes, that's it. We can buy one. We must be clean, for dirt is poison."

Dan Martin stirred the fire once more. He took the berries, left from supper, and cooked them in the tomato can. Then he toasted the bread.

"Breakfast is ready, Davie," he said, as he poured the berries over a brown slice of toast.

David looked at the toast with scorn.

"I can't eat that for breakfast," he said. "We had that for supper."

"Can't eat that? Why, what do you want?"

"I like wheat berries pretty well."

"Wheat berries? Wheat berries? I

never picked any wheat berries. Do you know where to get them?"

"Oh, you don't pick them! You buy them in a box. It says puffed wheat on it. You know."

"I guess I never tried any," said Dan Martin, shaking his head. "This is all we have this morning, David. You eat some. It's just as good as it was last night. You try a little."

But David shook his head.

"I don't want any breakfast anyway. You eat it."

"All right then," replied Dan Martin. "Just as you say."

He quickly ate the blueberry toast. Then he washed the dishes with boiling water, and made a neat bundle of the blanket, with the dishes and small things inside.

"Get a pail of water to throw on the fire, Davie," he said, "and we'll be off."

The fire was wet down till the last sparks died out in the hissing steam. Then Dan Martin took the bundle, and David took the pail, with the tomato can inside, and they started along the path he had followed the day before.

After following the path for some time, Dan Martin turned to the right, and they came out on a quiet street.

It was yet early, and no one met them as they marched along. The weather had changed as the sun came up. The cool air from the north rolled back before a hot wind from the south, and clouds began to gather, low in the sky, beyond the green fields.

Dan Martin walked along at a good pace, talking to the lad and showing him the birds and flowers.

“See, Davie, there is a kingfisher over there on that little bridge. He

flies all round the ponds, and watches the water. When he sees a little fish, he dives right in, plop! Goodby, little fish.

“Oh, look, Davie! There is some goldenrod, just coming out. It is early for goldenrod. Soon all the walls and hedges where we are going will almost turn to gold.”

To David this was a wonderland of beauty. He had longed to wander free along the roads and hedges. Cooped in his yard, he often pictured himself as a little tramp, wandering wherever he wished to go.

“Oh, look up, David! See that hawk! The old rascal is looking for his breakfast. He hopes to get a fat chicken perhaps. How he sails on the wind!”

As they went on, David, in spite of his joy at this new world, began to suffer. He had taken nothing but

water for breakfast, and he was faint from hunger.

He dragged his little feet and hung back on Dan Martin's hand.

"Come on, Davie. We must trot along if we expect to get to Rabbit Hollow before winter."

"What is Rabbit Hollow?" asked David, trying to keep up.

"Rabbit Hollow? Oh, that is the place where we are going to stay! It is a lovely place by the river. I have a little cabin there, where I used to live before I came to Newton."

"Are there any blueberries?" asked David.

"Blueberries? Oh, my rake and pitchfork! What blueberries! Why we have berries so thick up there that they make a blue carpet on the ground. You could pick a pail full in about nine seconds."

"Can you fish in the river?"

"Yes, sir! You can fish all day if you want. Perch, bass, pickerel, turtles. You will think you're in heaven, fishing there."

"What do they do with the turtles?"

"Oh, we eat the turtles! They are big ones. You boil them in a big kettle, and make soup. Not many people like turtles, but I do."

"I don't," said David. "I hate them."

"Well, you can eat the fish then. Come on, trot along. Move a little faster. That's the boy."

"I can't."

"You can't? What's the matter?"

"I'm hungry."

"Now, there you go! Didn't I tell you to eat that good toast? I knew you would be hungry, when the food was all gone."

"Can't you buy some food?" asked David with a sigh.

"To buy food, you need money. I spent all my money last night," replied Dan Martin. "But I have the crust of bread in my pocket. Do you want that to eat?"

"Yes," said David, holding out his hand for the dry crust.

"Well, wait till we get to a brook. You must wash your hands before you eat. It says so in the Bible."

"I washed my hands at breakfast. They are clean."

David looked at his white hands in surprise. Even Mary would have called them clean.

"Wash before you eat, and live till you die. Dirt is poison. You wait a minute. I'll let you use my Christmas soap.

"Oh, look, Davie! Look! What

luck!" he suddenly exclaimed, and pointed to a tree near the road.

"Apples, Porter apples, right by the road. We can help ourselves."

There in the grass beside the road they found some ripe, yellow, Porter apples, fallen from a wayside tree.

"We can fill our pockets full," cried Dan Martin, "and you can fill your pail. As soon as we come to a brook we can wash them, and have a feast."

They picked out the largest and best of the apples, and filled the pail and their pockets.

"Now for some water, sonny. I know there must be some down under those alders in that hollow," said the man, as they started on again.

Sure enough, running under the shade of the alders, was a little brook, fed from a spring that rose near the road.

There they washed the apples and

their hands. David, wondering if life were nothing but soap and water, received the crust of bread. It tasted better than any Christmas feast, as he ate it with a yellow apple, and drank the pure spring water.

"Come along, Davie, we must be trotting," said Dan Martin, after they had eaten, and rested in the shade a few minutes.

They went back to the road, which lay hot and dusty, under the glaring sun. People were awake now, and automobiles and wagons passed them, as they walked along.

"You keep over on the left side of the road with me, David," cautioned the man, holding his lad close.

"Why?" asked David.

"So we can save our lives," said Dan Martin with a laugh. "Automobiles have to run on the right-hand

side of the road. If we walk on the left side we can see them coming, and get out of the way."

Just then a small car passed them from behind. It went on a short way, then it slowed down and stopped.

A big man got out of the car. He had a blue coat with brass buttons. In his hand was a paper.

The man looked sharply at David as they went along, and then looked down at his paper.

He spoke to another man in the car, and shook his head.

"Whose boy is that?" he asked, as they came up.

Dan Martin stopped and took David by the hand.

"Why, I think he is my boy," he replied, smiling in a droll way.

"Oh, you do!"

"Yes, sir."

“Dan Martin turned to David. “Whose boy are you, Davie?” he asked, with the same smile.

David shrank back from the big man in the blue coat, and pressed close to Dan Martin.

“I’m your boy,” he said.

Again the man looked at his paper.

“Blue coat and pants, barefoot, cotton hat in blue stripes,” he read.

“That doesn’t fit this boy by half a mile,” said the man who drove the car.

“Besides, this boy is older.”

“Did you see a boy with a blue jacket and blue pants, about the size of this boy, who was barefoot?” asked the big man.

“I haven’t seen any boy at all except this boy right here, all the morning,” replied Dan Martin.

“Ah! we are just wasting our time, anyway,” put in the driver. “That

Baker boy is in the river, near the place where they found his shoes. They'll find him down below the aqueduct today or tomorrow."

The big man folded his paper and entered the car. They drove off, as Dan Martin and David marched on again toward Rabbit Hollow, that mysterious place where blueberries made a carpet on the ground, and fish of all kinds were waiting to be caught.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STORM

For an hour or so David managed to keep up; but then his feet began to ache, his head swam with the heat, and his step faltered.

"Come along, Davie," urged Dan Martin. "We must move on. Can't you go a little faster?"

"My feet ache," replied David.

"Oh, forget your feet! Don't think of them. See that lark on the wire. Hear him sing."

"My head aches," said David.

"Feet ache? Head ache? My, you are full of grief!

"Oh, I have an idea!" he added. "I'll carry you pick-a-back."

He reached down and lifted the boy, placing him on his shoulders, with his feet hanging down in front.

“Forward, march!” he cried, setting out at a brisk walk.

A few minutes later, a man working beside the road looked up. He stared a moment; then he laughed.

“Well, I never!” he exclaimed. He saw a man with rough, clean clothes, and brown, wrinkled skin, walking along the road, a sand pail full of apples in one hand, and a big bundle in the other.

On his shoulders sat a boy, his legs hanging down in front. One little hand clutched the man’s loose collar, and his head rested on the soft brown hat before him.

“Well, I never!” the man repeated. “That child is sound asleep.”

The man looked at the stranger who carried the child.

“Well, I never!” he exclaimed, for the third time. “It is hot as mustard, and he is loaded like a Colorado donkey; but he looks as if he were in heaven, with wings on his feet.”

Mile after mile Dan Martin marched along, with the sleeping boy, his boy, on his shoulders.

People smiled as he passed, and he returned their smiles. Heat, hunger, weariness were forgotten when he looked at the little hand that clutched his collar.

It was nearly noon when the brown head stirred, and he felt the boy straighten up.

“Are you awake, Davie?” he asked.

“Where are we?” asked David.

“Going right along to Rabbit Hollow. You have been sleeping on the train. Could you walk now?”

“Yes, let me down.”



Well, I never!

David rubbed his eyes, and looked about him. On the left, the road ran beside a forest. On the right, clean fields stretched down to a winding river, with soft green banks.

Clouds were piling up in the sultry sky. Great dark clouds, with white edges, rose almost to the sun, which still beat down upon them.

"We'll have a shower by and by," said Dan Martin. "That will cool the air, and lay the dust. I'm glad to see it. I love to walk after a shower."

"How far is it now?" asked David.

"Oh, not so very far! We'll soon be there, if we keep going right along. It is a lovely walk, Davie; hills and valleys, and brooks and rivers, and birds and flowers. See that swallow, with the blue back. That is a barn swallow. He flies close to the earth because it is going to rain."

"When do we have dinner?" asked David. "It must be dinner time."

"Oh, dinner? There, I had forgotten about dinner. Here are the Porter apples, all ready for us any time."

"I don't want any apples."

"But these are good apples. They are ripe and mellow. You wait till we wash our hands, and try that big one; you'll like it."

David shook his head. He seemed ready to drop from hunger, but the berries and apples had made him long for bread and butter.

"I'm sorry, David. I would buy you a big dinner, but I spent all my money last night. When we get to Rabbit Hollow I will earn money and feed you well."

"How?"

"Blueberries, for one thing. We can get twenty cents a quart for blue-

berries. We will both pick, and earn lots of money."

"I'll starve to death before we get to Rabbit Hollow."

"Oh, don't do that! Be a good boy now, and don't do it." Dan Martin looked at David with fear in his kind eyes, and pressed his hands.

They were passing a spot where the road went through a grove of great oak trees. A hollow had been filled in, and a brook ran under the road, flowing through an aqueduct, that was made with large stones.

"This is a good place to rest and eat," said the man, looking about at the clouds.

He led David down the bank to the aqueduct. Two small oak trees stood beside the entrance, and green grass covered the ground, where the brook ran through.

"Wait here a minute, Davie, I'll get a seat to hold us while it rains."

Dan Martin walked along the bank.

"I saw some good seats back here," he called, as he disappeared.

While he was gone, an automobile came into the grove of oak trees, near the brook.

David watched the people get out. A stout lady with gray hair was helped from the front seat by a strong young man. From the rear seat came an elderly man, with two pretty young women.

They spread robes on the grass, under the trees, and the strong young man quickly brought a large basket, and some boxes, from the car.

"We had better start right in," David heard him say. "That storm may come at any minute."

David was watching them from

behind the oak tree, when Dan Martin returned with a wide board.

"There," said the man, "that will make us a safe, dry seat."

"They have chicken sandwiches," replied David.

"We can perch right in here on this board," Dan Martin went on. "It fits exactly across the tunnel. We'll be as snug as two crickets in a haymow."

"They have potato chips, and olives, too," replied David.

"Oh, well, they haven't any Porter apples as good as ours, you may be sure of that."

David had his eyes glued on the picnic party. He sat like a stone image, watching everything they did.

"Come, Davie, wash your hands, and eat a nice apple. What is better than a juicy apple?"

Dan Martin held out a big apple,

close under David's nose, but the boy shook his head. There were tears in his eyes, as he watched the people passing the sandwiches, and potato chips, and olives, and stuffed eggs.

"They never can eat all that. Perhaps they will leave a little when they go," he said to himself, staring at all the little packages, done up in oiled paper, with pink strings.

Dan Martin tried once more to get him to eat an apple, but he pushed it away, and watched the party in the grove, as they began their lunch.

So Dan Martin washed his hands, and sat down in the shade to eat an apple, and rest his tired legs.

"Aha!" he cried, as he looked out over the big trees. "I hear that cloud talking to itself."

He seized the bundle, and the pail, and carried them into the aqueduct,

where he placed them in safety on the wide board.

Then he looked around.

"Our ship is all snug, and everything is on board," he chuckled. "Now all we have to do is to jump into the cabin. Let her come."

As he spoke, the sun was suddenly darkened. There was a rumble, and then a deep sigh in the forest, as if the oak trees mourned for the sun that had been made dark.

A shriek followed the moan, as a blast of wind tore through the great trees above them.

"Come in! Come in!" called Dan Martin, above the blast; and he drew David quickly into the tunnel.

As they perched on the wide board and looked out, there was a crash that turned them almost deaf, and the rain came down like a waterfall. Leaves

and small branches fell all about them in the grove.

The older woman jumped up with a shriek louder than that of the wind. She grabbed the auto robe and threw it over her head.

"Run!" she cried. "We'll be killed!"

She ran, without the help of the strong young man, and pulled herself into the car.

The young women seized the other robe, and ran still faster.

"But the lunch!" called the young man.

"Never mind the lunch. Let the birds have it. Hurry up!" cried the woman.

So the young man grabbed the empty basket, and ran for the car.

He was the last one. In a second he had started the motor, and the car sped away, down a cart path that led to the road.

There, on the ground behind them, lay the boxes, and the little bundles in wax paper.

“To the rescue, Davie!” cried Dan Martin, as the car disappeared. “Those chicken sandwiches will drown if I don’t save them.”

He dashed from the tunnel, with the pail in his hand. As he went, he turned the apples out on the soft ground.

David watched with dancing eyes as the man rapidly picked up the small bundles, and dropped them into the pail one after the other.

The lightning flared under the black cloud. The thunder crashed. The rain fell in torrents, driven by the gale, but neither man nor boy gave heed.

With the pail in one hand, and the boxes under his arm, Dan Martin ran back to their shelter, laughing.

“Oho, my mate!” he chuckled. “Here

is food for the whole voyage. Now let us count the cargo."

Dan Martin took off his wet coat and hung it on a stick in the stone wall. Then he laid out the little bundles on the wide, dry board.

"Chicken sandwiches, three bundles, nine sandwiches in all. Egg sandwiches, five bundles, ten sandwiches in all. Brown bread with butter and cheese, five bundles, ten sandwiches in all.

"Grab hold there, mate," he cried, passing two chicken sandwiches to David. "We can begin on these. I feel as if I could eat about twenty sandwiches myself."

"I didn't know you were hungry," said David, as he reached eagerly for the chicken sandwiches.

"The Captain must always keep his troubles to himself," said Dan Martin, as he took half a sandwich at a bite.

Then he opened a box.

"Six stuffed eggs, with salt and pepper. One bottle of queen olives, big ones from S. S. Pierce's store.

"One bottle of sweet pickles. Six big bananas."

He opened the other box.

"Chocolate layer cake, and sponge cake. Just smell them!

"There, mate," he concluded, "that will keep the crew from starving for a while, I reckon. What do you want next?"

"A stuffed egg and an olive," replied David, smiling happily.

So there they sat, on the wide board, eating like soldiers in a captured city.

Outside, the rain poured down, and beneath their feet the brook, swollen by the torrents, tumbled and swirled; but no kings at a royal banquet were ever half so happy and content.

CHAPTER IX

RABBIT HOLLOW

As the two travellers ate their banquet, safe in the shelter of the aqueduct, the storm gradually moved over them, and rumbled away in the distance.

David had just tucked in the last bite of sponge cake, when a shaft of bright sunshine shot through the leaves of the oak trees.

Puffs of a cool west wind shook down little showers of sparkling drops from the dripping leaves.

The hot, dry, dusty world had changed to a fresh, bright, cool world, in the magic of the storm.

“That may have been an ill wind, but it blew us a lot of good,” said Dan

Martin, as he packed the food in a box, and tied it.

"You put the apples in the pail, Davie, and we'll be off again."

The road that had seemed so weary and dreary to the lad, an hour before, was now a pathway of delight.

Rested and refreshed, he watched the clouds sail by, now piles of snow-white vapor, against a bright blue sky.

The brook gurgled beneath the alders. The birds flew about, bathing in the little pools, and singing to thank the storm for all their joy and comfort.

"Rabbit Hollow would be lovely this afternoon," said the man. "I wish we were there now."

"Is it very far?" asked David.

"Well, it is a good distance yet, but we'll get there in a day or two if we keep right on."

As he spoke, an automobile drove

past. It stopped in front of them. The driver was alone.

"Want a ride?" he called.

Dan Martin hesitated.

"Oh, yes, say yes," whispered David.

"We are going quite a distance," replied Dan Martin.

"So am I, with plenty of room," said the driver, smiling at David. "Where are you bound?"

"We are bound for Rabbit Hollow," replied Dan Martin.

"Is that where the blueberry fields are, just beyond the big lake?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm going right by. You'd better get in. I'll land you there in an hour or two."

"We have no money," said Dan Martin, still hanging back.

"Never mind that. The old car will ride better with two more."

He opened the door, and they got in, bundles, pail, and all.

David sank back in the soft cushions with a happy sigh, as the machine whirled along the road.

His whole body was lame and sore from the toil of the past day, but the exercise, the keen hunger, and the good luck gave him a feeling of rest and comfort he had never known before.

Dan Martin sat holding his hand, as happy as the child, and talked with the driver now and then, as they passed places that he seemed to know well.

As the miles flew by, the scenes changed. High hills, and then mountains, appeared in the distance. Lakes, larger than any that David had seen, came into view now and then.

Fields, with herds of cattle and sheep, stretched back from the road as far as the eye could reach.

These fields gave way to forests that arched leafy branches over the road, and covered it with deep shadows.

At last, as the shadows were growing longer, and the sun began to slope into the west, they passed a lake so large that David could hardly see the other shore in the distance.

"Here is the big lake," cried Dan Martin. "Rabbit Hollow is a mile or two beyond."

A few miles farther they climbed a high hill, and then came down into a wide, level valley.

In the center he could see a river, winding through.

A few small cottages here and there, and a few trees, broke the level of the pleasant plain.

"Well, here we are!" said the driver, as he stopped near one of the cottages that stood in the valley.

“And many thanks for your kindness,” said Dan Martin. “Shall you return this way?”

“Yes,” replied the man. “Why do you ask?”

“If you will stop here and ask for Dan Martin, or Dan Martin’s boy, there will be a pail of big blueberries waiting for you.”

“Now I call that good luck. I’ll be back tomorrow afternoon, and I won’t forget to stop,” answered the driver, as he started away.

A tall man had come from the cabin near by, and approached them, looking closely at Dan Martin.

“Well, I’ll be split and buttered, if it isn’t old Soapsuds,” he cried, as he came up.

“Howdy, Joe. Yes, I’m back again,” said Dan, giving the stranger his hand.

“You’ve changed a lot since you left

here," Joe went on. "I hardly knew you. Where is the wife?"

"She's gone, Joe. She died a long time ago."

"And this is your boy?"

"That's my David. Shake hands with Joe Collins, David. He's an old friend of mine."

David gave Joe his hand at once.

"That's the lad. He's a friendly little one, I guess," said Joe. "Well, we'll be glad to have you round here again, with the boy."

"Have you any more children, Joe?" asked Dan Martin.

"Children? Oh, yes, I have six or seven! In the winter, when I have to buy clothes, I have twice too many. In the summer, when blueberries are ripe, I haven't half enough. Once I almost had to go to picking berries myself."

"Say, Joe," said Dan Martin quickly, "how about my cabin? Is it vacant? I see it is still standing."

"Yes, you are in luck. Old Mrs. Jones moved in there after you left, and they fixed up the place quite a lot.

"She died last spring, but the cabin is in pretty good shape yet."

"Oh," replied Dan Martin. "Old Mrs. Jones lived there, did she? Say, Joe, do you think your wife would lend me a scrub brush and a bar of laundry soap?"

A bar of laundry soap!

David started suddenly. His mind went back to the pretty brick house, and the shady yard in Newton.

Events had followed one after another so rapidly that he had thought of nothing but himself and his new adventures.

"What is the matter, sonny?" asked

Joe Collins, seeing the strange look on David's frightened face.

"I guess he is tired out. We've had a pretty hard trip," replied Dan Martin. "If you'll let me have the soap and brush, we'll go right over to the cabin."

"Go along with your bundles. I'll bring the soap, and an axe. The old cook stove is there, and one bed. That's about all."

So Dan Martin led the way across the plain to a little gray cabin that stood near the river.

"Well, now," said Dan Martin, "the old shack is standing proud and pretty. See that roof, Davie? I split out those shingles myself a long time ago. That roof is as good as the day it was born. It won't leak a drop."

He opened the door, and they went in.

There were two rooms, a bedroom and a kitchen.

In the bedroom was an iron bed with a mattress, and a wooden chair. Both were strong and whole.

In the kitchen was a rusty stove, a wooden sink, and a table. On the wall hung a calendar, showing the month of May for the same year.

The stove had been propped up on bricks in front, where the legs were broken out, and the oven door was mended with iron wire.

The table was made from boards, nailed against the wall, with two legs to support it in front.

“Good luck!” cried Dan Martin. “We can camp here as cozy as swallows in a tight barn. The old lady saved the house for us, I guess.”

“The windows are broken,” said David, looking about.

“All the more air to breathe. The mosquitos are gone by this time. We’ll

have plenty of time to mend them before cold weather.

“Let’s try the old stove,” added Dan Martin. “It will be chilly tonight.”

He picked up some sticks of dry birch that lay near the door.

First he put in a strip of birch bark, and then some wood.

He lit a match and placed it under the bark. There was a sputter, then a crackle, then a roar, as the flames shot up the iron chimney.

“She’s just as good as she ever was,” cried Dan Martin, closing the slides, and spreading his hands over the warm surface of the stove.

“Listen, Davie,” he whispered, “don’t you tell a soul, but”—he bent his head down close to David’s ear—“I know how to make pancakes.

“You just wait till we get this place fixed up. Won’t we have fun!”

Dan Martin put a big piece of wood in the stove, and then went into the dusty bedroom.

He took the mattress from the iron bed, and threw it on a sandy spot outside. Lighting a match, he set the mattress on fire.

“What are you burning that for? Isn’t that a good mattress?”

“Yes, it makes a grand bonfire. That’s all it’s good for. Now you watch this, and keep the fire from getting into the grass, while I get some water to wash out the house.”

Dan Martin took the tin pail, and hastened to the river. As he came back, Joe Collins arrived, followed by a boy and a girl.

The boy was a year or two older than David. The girl seemed about his age.

“This is Owen, and this is Nellie,” said Joe Collins.

"See that medal Owen has on," he continued, as the children stood looking shyly at one another. "He won that in the water contest last week, for fancy diving."

Owen held up his head with pride, and felt of the little medal, hanging on a blue ribbon that was pinned to his shirt with a gold pin.

"You must be a champion, Owen," said Dan Martin. "You will teach David to dive, won't you? He wants to learn right away."

"Can you swim, David?" asked Owen, turning to his new friend.

"I don't know, I guess so. I never tried," replied David.

"Dear me, Davie," said Dan Martin, in surprise, "I thought you could swim last summer. Well, my poor head is no good anyway. I do forget almost everything I remember."

They all laughed at this, and Joe Collins started off with the children, leaving the tools he had brought.

“Owen will be glad to show him, if he’s forgotten how to swim,” he said. “Good luck, Dan, let us know if we can help you.”

CHAPTER X

A NEW HOME

"Come on now, Davie," cried Dan Martin, when the Collins family had gone. "We must hurry and get all cleaned up before dark. You can make the bed while I swab the house."

Taking the axe, he led the boy across the field to a group of trees.

"We'll trim some of these firs," he said, "and give the blueberries a better chance to grow."

Choosing some young fir trees, about twenty feet high, Dan Martin cut off the lower branches with his axe.

"Now you grab a couple of branches and drag them over to the house," he directed. "I'll follow with the rest."

Soon they had a pile of fir branches on the ground near the cabin.

“Now, old bed, it is Saturday night for you,” he cried. “Come right out and be washed.”

In a moment the bed was taken apart, and Dan Martin was scrubbing every inch of it with the stiff brush. When he was through, it looked almost like a new bed.

“I guess you never slept on a fir bed, did you, Davie?” he asked, as he laid the spring across two logs.

David shook his head.

“Well, I’ll show you how to make it. Then you can work while I am washing out the bedroom.”

The man cut a few twigs of fir from the tips of the branches, and stuck the cut ends down through the holes in the bedspring.

“See?” he asked. “You stick in a

little branch every inch or two, and when they lie close together they make the softest, sweetest bed you ever did sleep on in this world."

David quickly learned just how to push in the twigs, and lay them close together. Then Dan Martin cut a pile of twigs with the axe, and left David to finish the bed, while he got a pail of fresh water, and started to scrub out the bedroom.

David took some twigs, and pushed them into the bed spring. The fir was fragrant, and the work easy. Then he began to remember how tired he was, and how his legs ached.

His hands fell into his lap, and he sat on the edge of the bed, looking across the river to the mountains, where the blue mist was already beginning to gather in the eastern hollows.

Dan Martin came out to get another pail of water.

He saw David sitting there, and watched him, as he returned from the river. The boy did not move.

Dan Martin took up his brush again, but he stopped whistling and began to talk to the brush.

"Do you know," he said, "I guess Davie must like to sleep on the floor. I don't mind it a bit, but I should think it would be hard and cold for him on such a chilly night."

Scrub, scrub, scrub, went the brush.

David looked up.

"You don't suppose he thinks I am going to help him with that bed, do you?" the man continued. "If he does, he better guess again. That is his job, and he can sleep right on the floor till it is done."

Scrub, scrub, scrub, went the brush.

David reached out his hand for some fir twigs of the right size.

He choked back a sob. If he lay down and died right there, how sorry Dan Martin would be.

He listened again. Scrub, scrub, scrub. The brush was going back and forth, and the water was splashing over the floor in little rivers.

It would be terrible to sleep on a wet floor, with only one blanket.

The boy grasped the fir twigs, and set to work.

"I guess I am going to die," he said to himself, "but I don't care. I've got to have a bed to sleep in."

As the branches went into the holes in the spring, and were laid back over each other, in spicy soft layers, David found that it was not ending his short life after all. It was almost like play.

He was busily at work, pushing in



Making the fir bed

the branches just where they ought to go, when he looked up at the open window. Dan Martin was peeping at him through the broken pane.

His blue eyes were all that David could see, but they were lighted up with so much love and laughter that David could not help laughing himself.

The face disappeared, and the brush began again.

“I told you he would do it. I told you so. See how even the rows are, and how smooth it is. He’s the boy to work for me.”

The next time Dan Martin came out for fresh water, David was busily at work, with a little smile on his face. By the time Dan Martin had finished with his soap and water, the branches were all in place, and a soft, fragrant bed was ready for the night.

“Ah, that’s the boy for me!” cried

Dan Martin, when he saw the bed all done, and well done.

He grasped David by the waist and lifted him high in the air.

"I knew you could do it, Davie. You see if you're not glad at bed time. These boards are so cold and damp.

"Now we'll take her inside and stand her up on her hind legs. Can you lift that end?"

David took hold of one end of the spring. He gave a lift, and raised it.

"That's the boy! You're a buster!"

So the bed was carried in again and set up in the little bedroom. It was fresh and clean now. Dan Martin had washed the ceiling, and walls, and the floor. Every cobweb was gone.

The odor of the bed spread through the little room, making it seem as if the fragrant forest had come right in through the window.

Dan Martin spread the blanket over the soft fir bed.

“There, mate, there’s a bed fit for any king to sleep on. You just wait till you try it. You never catch me sleeping on an old mattress.”

Then Dan Martin went into the kitchen. The table was scrubbed, and the stove had lost most of its rust.

“If you’ll undo the bundles, and put the food out on the table, I’ll get wood enough for the night. We’ll have a hot fire to dry off this castle, and toast our shins.”

Dan Martin went out with the axe, while David gladly began to undo the bundles, and lay out the food, on the oiled paper.

Through the open door he could look across the valley to the river, and the mountains beyond.

Little wisps of white vapor were

rising from the river, in shady spots. The soft mist about the mountains was dark blue now, and creeping upward toward the top.

He could hear a dog barking at some cows across the river, where a boy, not much bigger than he, was letting down the pasture bars.

The cold, clear air from the mountain, loaded with the odors of the forest, drew in through the open door. David filled his lungs and shivered. He was in a new world, full of strange wonder and delight.

“Blow the whistle, Davie, there will be a big fire round here,” said Dan Martin, with a happy laugh, as he came in with an armful of dry birch wood.

He opened the stove and laid in the birch bark, with small wood on top; then the larger wood.

“Here’s a match, mate, touch her

off," he said, handing David a match from his pocket.

It was the first time David had ever lighted a fire.

He smiled with delight, and drew the match across the rough iron.

It lighted, and he held it to the birch bark, that curled and flashed with fire, as the flame was caught.

In a moment the fire was snapping in the stove, and roaring up the chimney, while the ruddy heat filled the little room with glowing comfort.

"Shut the stove door, Davie, before we burn the house down," laughed Dan Martin, as he brought in the old chair, now fresh and clean.

"You sit here on this chair. Your little legs are tired. I'll take an apple and some sandwiches, and sit here in the doorway, where I can watch the shadows on the hills.

“It makes my head feel better when I can see the hills in the sunshine, Davie. My poor head. I’m afraid it’s cracked right across the top.

“A man down in Newton said I was crazy, and I guess I must be, I forget things so.

“Here is my Christmas soap, laddie,” he added. “Let’s wash our hands real clean, and have our supper.”

Dan Martin sat on the doorstep with his supper beside him, while David sat on the old chair by the table. He took some chicken sandwiches, and olives, and cake, and a big ripe banana, and stretched his aching legs in the pleasant heat from the stove, while he ate this unexpected feast.

When supper was finished, the sun had set, and the evening breeze was sighing through the trees beyond the cabin on the plain.

David's mind went back to the home he had left. It seemed far, far away now, and it seemed a long, long time since he was there.

"Mary will never find me here," he said to himself. "I guess she wishes now that she had treated me more kindly while I was at home."

The little brown head nodded forward in the pleasant heat of the stove. The lids fell over the brown eyes. The blue edge of the mountain, clear against the gold of the evening sky, was fading from his sight.

"Hullo, there, it is bedtime in the cabin." Dan Martin rose from the doorway and took David in his arms.

Going to the bed, he folded the blanket so that one part was under David, as he laid him down. Then he folded the other over him.

"Listen to the crickets, David," he

whispered. "They sing a thousand new tunes every night."

And David lay and listened, while Mother Nature, singing in the chorus of a myriad of tiny sweet voices, that rose and fell in a cadence soft and full, like the waves on shining sands, lulled him to sleep.

CHAPTER XI

THE SWIMMING LESSON

“Ready for a swim, are you? Well, I’ll have to wake David. I had an idea he was going to sleep all day.”

David heard the words outside, as he opened his eyes.

The sun was streaming in through the window, and a fire was snapping in the stove.

“Don’t wake him, he must be tired to death, after his long walk. I was going in for a swim, and thought I would take him along.”

The voice of Owen Collins sounded by the cabin door.

There was a patter of bare feet on the boards, and a brown head appeared in the window.

"I'm awake! I'm all ready!" cried David.

"Aha! There he is, as bright as a tin spoon," said Dan Martin. "You want to go swimming with Owen, do you, David?"

"Yes," replied David, "but—"

"But what?"

"I haven't any bathing suit."

Owen laughed.

"Neither have I," he answered. "We don't wear bathing suits down at the river. Come along."

"Make him go right in and learn," called Dan Martin, as they started off toward the river.

David took in deep breaths of the brisk morning air, as they walked to the swimming pool.

The last little trails of mist were vanishing in the warm air above the river, that rolled lazily through Rabbit

Hollow, and slid from sight round a small mountain at the lower end.

The higher mountains, that had seemed so far away in the blue distance last evening, were now close at hand in the morning light. David could see the trees up the hillsides, and the rocks near the summit.

“There are whacking berries up there in the mountains,” said Owen, as David looked up. “They will be ripe next week, and then we’ll take our lunch and a lot of pails. I picked twenty quarts last year in one day.”

“How do you get across the river?” asked David.

“We have a flat boat, tied up near the swimming pool. We use it for fishing too. You can’t pick berries while they’re wet, so I go fishing on rainy days. It’s great fishing here in the river.”

David was looking about in the clear sky for a promise of rain, when they came to the pool.

A great willow had grown at a bend in the stream. The shore at the lower part of the bend was covered with fine white sand, and sloped gradually into the water, making it safe for children.

Under the willow tree, just above, the bank plunged straight down, and the cool dark water formed a deep pool beneath the shade of the wide branches.

Between the roots of the great tree Owen had fixed a strong board. Here he had practiced diving.

"So deep," cried Owen, as he stood springing up and down on the end of the board.

He leaped into the air with a graceful curve, and disappeared beneath the water, leaving hardly a bubble behind him.



Wait a minute

David watched to see him come up. He did not appear.

David looked up stream and down stream. There was no sign of Owen.

Poor David felt his heart thumping in his breast. He would run and tell Dan Martin.

He grabbed his clothes, to put them on as fast as he could.

"Wait a minute. I thought you were going in."

A voice came from the water. David looked over, and there was Owen, grinning at him from behind a root of the willow tree.

The little rogue swam under water and came up quietly behind the root, to see what David would do.

"Come on. It's your turn next," he said, taking David by the hand, and leading him down to the sloping beach.

As they came to the edge, David drew back and tried to pull away.

"What's up now? Are you afraid? Haven't you ever been in before?"

"No," replied David. "Once I had my bathing suit all on, and was just going in, but my mother said it was too cold for little boys."

"Well, it's time you did. It isn't cold in this water. Dan Martin said you should go right in, so come on."

Owen took David by the hand and pulled him down into the water. The farther he went in, the more frightened David became.

"Let me go," he said, pulling back.

"Let go nothing. I'll duck you. That's the way to learn at first."

David struggled, but it was of no use. Owen drew him on.

"Keep your mouth shut," cried Owen, and grabbing David by the

shoulders, he pulled him forward, and ducked him under the water.

David came up like a water spout. He splashed the spray in every direction, and scrambled for the shore, choking and sobbing.

Once safe on the bank, he sat down on the soft grass, and began to cry.

Owen walked over to his diving board, and began to practice.

David cried and sobbed louder.

Owen dived better than before.

David raised his voice into a scream. Then he listened.

No one answered. No one came. At home the whole household would have flown to his side.

Owen did not even look at him. What a terrible world he had stumbled into. He was fairly stunned with surprise. He was silent. Why should he cry, if no one listened?

Seeing everything quiet once more, Owen looked over.

"Huh!" he said. "I could yell twice as loud as that if I tried. I didn't know you were a baby. You better run home to Dan Martin and have a ride in your baby carriage."

A queer feeling came over David. He started to cry because he was afraid, and had kept it up because Owen paid no attention to him, and made him angry.

"You tried to drown me," he replied, wiping his eyes.

"You're lucky I didn't throw you off the springboard," said Owen. "That is the way we usually do. I thought you wanted to learn to swim."

"Well, I do." David was digging little holes in the wet sand with his toe.

Owen took a back dive.

"I'll tell you what," he said, when

he had returned to the board, in the cool shade of the willow. "I promised Dan Martin I would teach you to swim, and I'll give you one more chance. If you want to learn to swim you just walk in there and duck up by yourself."

David looked at the water, as it rippled along the sandy shore in the morning breeze. It seemed terribly deep out there.

"If you walk right in and duck under, I'll come over and show you how to swim. If you don't, you can go home to the nursery and stay. This is no place for babies."

Owen tried a perfect jackknife dive, and came shooting out of the water almost as soon as he touched it.

David flushed. The one great dream of his life was to swim and dive, as the older boys did.

The word baby cut him. He knew he acted like one, and was ashamed.

But the water looked so deep out there. The river was so big. The breeze rippled in tiny waves, and he could see nothing below the surface.

“Will you come over here while I do it?” he asked.

“All right, go ahead.” Owen left the board and came to where David stood, on the sunny bank.

David walked into the water. His feet seemed like lead. It took all his force of will to lift one foot and put it before the other.

But he knew it was his last chance. Owen would send him home and make him stay there.

One yard in. Two yards in. The water was almost up to his knees.

“Go ahead,” cried Owen. “You’re all right.”

Another yard in. The water was above his knees.

David gasped, and turned to look at Owen. The grin on his quaint, freckled face made him turn and take two more steps into the river.

Then, with his heart beating till he could hear it thump against his sides, he bent over, and plunged his head beneath the laughing little waves.

"There," said Owen, as he came up from the water, and looked proudly around, "that didn't drown you, did it? You are still alive.

"Now do it again."

So David ducked under again. His fear was gone now, and he did not pull back when Owen drew him out into deeper water, and began to show him the strokes.

In a few minutes David was splashing about, as confident in the water as if

he had been born there, and soon won a word of praise from his teacher.

"You're doing it. That's the boy. You'll be like a duck in a puddle by next week," laughed Owen, as David splashed toward the shore, half under the water.

"Hey, there!" came a voice from the bank, "don't we pick any fresh blueberries today?"

Dan Martin stood under the big willow, watching the two lads.

"Don't say hay to me. I'll shake my harness off, it makes me feel so hungry," laughed Owen.

The two boys hurried into their clothes.

"Can David swim?" asked Dan Martin, as they started back to the cabin for the pails.

"No, but he will learn in a day or two, if he keeps on trying."

“I’ll have to take my head to a locksmith, and have a key fitted,” Dan Martin went on. “I was sure he could swim first rate last summer.”

David said nothing. Like a puppy who has bitten off his leash, he was full of joy at his new activity and freedom.

CHAPTER XII

THE STINT

"Your pa said he would lend us the pails for today," said Dan Martin, as they went back to the cabin.

"Yes, we have plenty," replied Owen. "I'll say that we need plenty. The berries are as thick as children at a free show. Come right over as soon as you have had breakfast."

Mrs. Collins and John Collins, Owen's little brother, joined Owen and Nellie, who went along with David and Dan Martin to pick berries.

It was a merry crew. The day was cool and clear, the berries would be thick, and the price was high, twenty cents a quart.

Before long they left the road, and went into a path that led along the river through some alders.

“Oh!” cried David. “Here are lots of berries.”

“Oh, shucks!” sniffed Owen. “These aren’t worth picking. This is where the town people come to pick berries. You just wait till we get to our place.”

It seemed strange to David to walk on and on, past bushes loaded with berries; but no one touched them.

They crossed a marshy spot, where Dan Martin carried little John, and the children jumped from one tuft of grass to another.

At last they passed through a little grove of birch and maple trees, and came out just under the slope of Shadow Mountain.

There the pasture spread out before them, covered with a carpet of blue.

The berries were big, and grew so thick you could gather them almost by the handful in any spot.

"We'll put our big pails under that maple, beside the spring, where we can't lose them, and then we can set to work," said Mrs. Collins.

"What is my stint?" asked Owen.

"You ought to make it ten quarts today," she replied. "We are a little late. Can you do that?"

"Sure," said Owen.

"I will do twelve quarts," she went on, "and Nellie can do eight. How many did you do yesterday, John?"

"Free," piped John.

"Well, your stint is two today. If you do three I'll buy you some candy."

"I guess I'd better go easy today," said Dan Martin. "I'll make my stint eight quarts. I won't bite off more than I can chew."

“What is a stint?” asked David.

“A stint is a number of quarts you have got to pick,” replied Owen. “If I take a stint of ten quarts, I have got to pick them all before I go home, and no one can help me.”

“What do you take for a stint, Davie?” asked Dan Martin.

“I can pick as many as Nellie. I’ll take eight quarts for my stint.”

“Oh, no, Davie,” said Owen. “Nellie is a fast picker. There is no fooling about this. No one can help you, not even Dan Martin. You can’t come home till you have picked your stint. You don’t want to stay and pick all alone, do you?”

“No, of course not.”

“Well, you take a stint of four quarts then. If you pick those, you can take a bigger stint tomorrow.”

David flushed.

"I can pick as many as a girl," he declared, putting his shoulders back.

"We shall see, Davie," said Dan Martin. "You take the four-quart stint today. We don't want to leave you here alone."

So David, with a little pout, took his four-quart stint, and they set to work.

Owen started at once to walk across the pasture to find a spot he liked best.

David followed him.

"Hold on, Davie. Perhaps Owen would rather be alone," called Dan Martin.

"Oh, that's all right!" laughed Owen. "He can come if he'll promise not to sit all over them."

So David followed Owen over to his private patch, as he called it.

The berries were large and plenty, and it was fun at first to pull them off and rattle them into the pail.

"This is great," said David. "This is what I always longed to do."

"Yes, I like it," replied Owen, "but you have to watch out. If you put all those green ones in, you must pick all your berries over. They look mussy when they are picked over, and people won't buy them."

David picked out some of the green ones, and mashed those near them, with his chubby thumb and fingers.

"Better let them alone, now. At home you can pour them into a pan," advised Owen.

David picked a few more, and then went over to a spot where they seemed more plenty.

Owen kept right on, picking with both hands.

"Oh, look at all you have picked!" cried David, coming back.

"Yes, you had better put on a little

steam, or you won't have your stint done," returned Owen.

David set to work again, but the sun was hot, and his back began to ache from bending over. He sat on a stone and watched Owen.

"You won't fill your pail that way," said Owen, looking up. "What is the matter?"

"I'm tired. I'm just resting for a minute," replied David.

"All right then, but just remember the rule. You stay till you pick your stint. Nobody can help you."

"Oh, I'll have them picked! That is easy," David replied.

He set to work once more, but the pail did not fill up so fast as he had expected to fill it.

Almost before he knew it, David heard little John pipe up, "I'm done. I'm done."

“Good for you, John! Now get one more quart, and you shall have some candy this afternoon.”

“How are you coming on, Davie?” called Dan Martin.

David did not answer.

“He has about a quart,” called Owen.

“Oh, Davie, you must get to work! We are nearly done,” said Dan Martin.

“My head aches,” said David.

“I guess I’ll have to help you then,” replied Dan Martin, starting toward the two boys.

“No you won’t either,” exclaimed Owen. “He has just been loafing. He hasn’t tried at all.”

“Why can’t he help me?” demanded David, with a pout.

“Because you took your stint, and didn’t pick it. Four quarts was nothing to get, here in this patch.”

"I might help him just a little," suggested Dan Martin.

"All right then. Go ahead and help him," Owen flared up. "Only remember that if you do, he will never come for berries with us again. He can get right into his go-cart, and you can push him around and feed him milk."

Dan Martin paused.

"I guess he is right, Davie," he said.

"It is a rule. Everybody must do his stint. Why didn't you pick it?"

"I didn't feel very well."

"I guess you'll live to finish," snorted Owen. "You let him alone now, Dan Martin, and he will learn. He can't fool us."

"I guess we had better do as he says, Davie," said Dan, looking sadly at the boy. "If we break the rule, they won't let you come along. You can't go swimming or fishing either."

"I don't care," grumbled David.

"Maybe you don't now," replied Dan Martin, in an anxious voice, "but you will care tomorrow, when they go swimming in the river."

David shook his head, and sat watching, while Dan Martin sadly returned to his berry pails.

Before long the pails were full, and the stints were done. All but David were ready to go home. His pail was hardly half full.

Poor Dan Martin was like a hen with a lone chicken.

"It is tough for the lad," he said to himself, "but the boys will half kill him if he quits, or if I help him.

"See, Davie," he explained, "you must stay here and pick your stint. You can't lose your way. Look, I will take this paper, this big newspaper. I'll tear it into little pieces, and leave

them along the path. When you fill your pail, come right along home. You will see the papers all along the path. It will be just like a game."

"I am sorry, David," added Mrs. Collins, "but we are late to lunch now, and can't wait any longer."

David watched them, as they gathered their pails, and started down the path towards home.

"Are you going to leave me here all alone?" he asked, looking up at Dan Martin.

Dan Martin paused.

"I could just stay and keep him company, couldn't I?"

He looked at Mrs. Collins.

"No, sir, you couldn't," replied Owen. "He'll be all right. The berries won't bite him. You come along with us, and let him take his time about it. He can't fool me."

"I guess I'll have to go, Davie," the man said sadly. "You'll have a terrible time round here if the boys call you a quitter. You hurry along, and you'll be home almost as soon as we are."

David stood and watched him as he turned and followed the others down the path.

When he was sure that it was all true, that they were really going, his eyes filled with tears.

As they went on and on, without turning back, sobs came to choke him. Then, when he felt that he was all alone, the sobs grew to wails of sorrow, and screams of rage.

At home such a proof of agony would have brought half the street flying to his relief; but even Dan did not turn back.

"He's such a little lad," he said, with quiet appeal to Owen.

“He’s big enough to stick his chest out, and say he’ll take eight quarts for his stint!” sniffed Owen. “He’s big enough to make a terrible noise, too; I’ll say that for him. Hear him yell. He’ll knock the berries off.”

Mrs. Collins walked on ahead. She knew the ways of children.

“Come along, Dan,” she said, with a smile. “The louder he yells, the sooner he’ll quit, and start picking again.”

So they wound their way about a clump of birches, and disappeared.

David watched them till the last one was gone. Then he shrieked:

“Go on! Go on, if you want to! I don’t care! I’ll never pick another berry as long as I live!”

With that he threw himself down squarely on a mat of large berries, and covered his face with his hands, and berry juice.

CHAPTER XIII

DAVID WINS A BATTLE

After staying there for some time, flat on the ground, David was surprised to find that Death had not come to his relief. He was still alive.

The sun was hot upon his back. Perhaps it would be better to go over and die beneath the maple tree in the shade, on the grass.

He rose and stumbled over to the spot where they had left their pails. Then he knew that he was thirsty, so he lay down on the cool moss, and drank from the little spring that bubbled out of the shining pebbles.

He let the icy water run over his

forehead and his face, and watched the clear stream bubble out below him, into the sandy bowl.

The sand and bubbles seemed to whirl after each other in the pool, and laugh as if at play.

The sobs grew less and less. David sat up and began to think.

"When I get back, I'll tell everybody who I am, and where I live, and then they'll have to take me right back home," he said to himself, as he looked about the lonely field.

"When I get home—I'll, I'll, I'll—"

A little voice inside him seemed to say: "You'll be shut up in a yard with a fence around it, and stay there all day long, and eat a whole *bar of soap*."

That bar of soap had grown very small in his mind since yesterday, and very far away, but now it suddenly grew, until it was nearly as large as

those wonderful bars of soap on the bill boards by the road.

The boy rested his chin in his hand, and thought.

His father had often praised people who kept their word; who did as they had promised.

"That man's word is just like money in your pocket," he used to say of men he loved and respected.

"You took your stint," the little voice continued, "but you didn't pick it."

"I don't care!" declared David. "They're mean as dirt. I wouldn't treat them so."

"They all picked their big stints," replied the little voice. "They worked hard, but you didn't try."

"I had a headache, too," thought David.

"A very little teeny one, but you didn't try, you know you didn't."

"I wouldn't go swimming with them any way, not for a hundred old brass medals," said David.

"Nor fishing?" asked the small voice.

David was silent. He had forgotten about the fishing.

He sat a while and thought.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said at last. "I'll pick my stint, because I don't want to be a quitter, but I'll never speak to one of those Collins people again as long as I live."

So he picked up his pail, and started over to the spot where he had seen the best berries.

His head really ached now, and he felt hollow inside, for it was past noon; but he had made up his mind to pick his stint, and pick it he would.

David's pail held more than five quarts. He made a mark where he

felt sure the four quarts would stop, and set to work with both hands.

Even the angry lad was surprised to see how fast the berries went in, now that he really tried. Minute by minute he picked away, and little by little the berries rose in the pail.

Just as he had seen Owen do, he would raise a branch from the ground, and pull off the ripe berries, avoiding the green ones and the leaves.

"I'll show him that I can pick as clean as anybody," he grunted, as he stooped over the low bushes.

Thin clouds had gathered about the sun. It was cooler now, and David stuck right at his work.

"There!" he said at length. "I'll bet that is four quarts."

He groaned as he straightened up. His back was lame from bending. But one glance at his berries, well up to the

mark, made him smile with pleasure, to know he had kept his word.

He drove the smile away at once, with an awful frown, for he did not intend to be happy again for a long, long time.

To save walking, he cut straight across the pasture, near the bank of the river, to the spot where the path led out to the road.

It took him longer than he expected, and twice he had to turn again to the left, to avoid wet spots.

At last he came to a halt. Right before him was a little creek, which he could not cross.

David turned to the right again to get around the creek, and came to a clump of birches and young oaks, that grew close together.

"I won't turn back again," the lad declared. "I can get through those."

He stooped and pushed the branches aside, crawling through on his hands and knees. In a moment he saw an open spot, surrounded by more oaks and birches.

He started to cross this open place, and then stopped short in his tracks, almost dropping his pail.

The ground about him was covered with the most wonderful blueberries. They were a pale, dusty blue, growing on bushes that stood only a few inches from the ground.

David set down his pail, and tasted a few. They were sweeter than those he had been picking, and almost twice as large as any he had seen.

Balboa, when he saw the Pacific Ocean from a peak in Darien, did not feel more pride than David felt, as he gazed around this little blue ocean of berries.

"I guess I'll show them who can pick berries," he said, and this time he forgot to chase away the smile that spread over his face.

Stepping carefully, to save the berries, David filled his pail to the very brim, and even heaped it up a little in the middle for good measure.

Then he crossed the patch, and crawled through the bushes on the other side of the open space.

"I'm glad Dan Martin threw that paper down," he thought. "That paper will tell me when I find the path."

Sure enough, before long he came to a path, and right beside it was a piece of newspaper.

Following along this path, David soon came to another piece of paper, then another, and soon he could see the road, winding down the river bank.

"Here comes David," called Mrs.

Collins, as she looked up the road, after they had finished their lunch.

“Why, Owen Collins, that boy has filled his pail way up to the top.”

Owen went to the window, as David came down the lane, with his chin up, looking straight ahead.

“Great pickerel! Look at those big berries, Ma!” cried Owen, as David approached the house.

Mrs. Collins stepped partly through the door.

“Well, David,” she called, “I guess you fooled us that time. You picked nearly double your stint.”

“Where did you get those whackers, Davie?” asked Owen.

David made no answer. His chin went a little higher, and his chest went out a little farther.

“Oh, he feels so smart!” Owen began, but he felt a firm grip on his arm.

"If you hector that child once more today, Owen, you will stand up to your supper. He has more than done his stint. You be nice to the lad."

"But he's so proud, Ma."

"It was pride that made him get all those great berries. Pride that makes us lift our chins and work a little more is the pride that wins the prize."

"Hello, Davie," she called, as he was passing in silence. "Wait a minute, will you? I want little John to see those berries. He never saw any like that in Rabbit Hollow."

David hesitated. He looked over at Mrs. Collins, who was smiling kindly.

"She never did you any harm," whispered the small voice. "She had to go home and get dinner."

He turned partly, and went nearer to the door, where he put down his pail.

"John! John! Come and see what

David picked," called Mrs. Collins, as she came out.

Little John came running, and Owen went out also.

"Oh!" exclaimed little John. "They are as big as robin's eggs."

"To think that you picked all those as soon as this," added his mother. "I guess you were just pretending, so we would come home, and let you go to your secret place.

"Did you have to go very far for them?"

"No'm," replied David, before he thought.

"May I have just one to taste?" asked little John.

"Sure," answered David, picking out a big one.

"You may have one, too," he went on, picking out two or three beauties for Mrs. Collins.

"Are they sweet, Ma?" asked Owen.

"Delicious," she replied. "He will let you taste them, won't you, Davie?"

"Oh, I s'pose so!" David replied, turning red at this complete surrender.

He took several berries, and passed them to Owen, without looking at him.

"Oh! Um!" exclaimed Owen. "Those are scrumptious. I'd be willing to tell the very best fishing places I know, if any one would take me to that patch. It looks like rain tomorrow, too."

David looked up. The clouds, that shaded the sun when he was picking berries, were thicker now. The sky had turned pearl gray.

"Well," said Mrs. Collins, "if you get in a load of wood, and tidy up the yard, you and David could take a lunch and go up to Willow Brook for trout."

"That's the way to talk, Ma. You get a hundred in oral composition,"

shouted Owen. "Oh, you speckled beauties! Did you ever eat a trout, Davie—trout fried in bacon fat?"

"No."

"Well, you just hustle round, and get your chores all done, if you have any. Tomorrow will be a great day for trout. I can taste 'em now. There is only one fish that is better than trout, Davie."

"What is that?"

"That is tripe, Davie. That's the best fish of all," laughed Owen, as he started toward the wood pile.

Mrs. Collins brought a round bundle to the door.

"John," she said, "run along with Davie, and take this home for him. It's a little surprise."

So little John took the round bundle, and went along with David.

Dan Martin was waiting for them outside the cabin.

His joy and pride when he saw the pail of berries were too much to hold.

"I guess they won't ever call my boy a quitter again. No, sir, never!"

He bustled about, getting dinner for David, who was nearly starved.

"Flapjacks, Davie," he whispered in the boy's red ears. "Flapjacks, with berries in them, all hot, waiting for you on the stove."

"Here, muvver sent this over," piped little John.

"What's that? What's that?"

Dan Martin took the round bundle.

"Well now, I never!" he exclaimed, as he opened the package.

"A pie! A blueberry pie! Look at that, Davie. You never tasted one of her pies. You just wait."

So David, happy as a conqueror, returned from war, washed once more with the Christmas soap, and sat

down to a feast of flapjacks and fresh blueberry pie just out of the oven.

That afternoon Dan Martin took all their berries down to the village and sold them, while David had a long nap on the sweet fir bed.

"I can't go to sleep, I never can," he said, when Dan Martin urged him to rest, "but I'll try if you want me to."

Hardly had the sound of the man's feet died away, when his eyes closed. He was dreaming of fried trout with blueberry sauce, when he heard the door open, and Dan Martin came in.

"Good boy, Davie," he chuckled. "That was a fine nap.

"Just see what I got for the berries," he added, holding out some silver in his hands. "I bought some bread, and bacon, and flour, too."

He brought out a small bundle from a pail, and held it up to David.

"This is yours. I got it for you. No boy round here has one half so good. It cost a lot."

Dan Martin stood watching with shining eyes, while David pulled off the paper.

Inside, he found a trout line and six tiny hooks, in a metal box.

It's silk, real gray silk," he said. "The trout can't see it in the water, and come right up to be caught."

David's face showed what his tongue could not say. He was silent with joy, and felt the soft silky line over and over in his hands.

He had not expected to fish, himself. It would have been keen joy to go and watch Owen fish. To have a line and hooks all his own, and better ones than Owen had, made him feel as if he were stepping right into heaven.

"I've brought more good news, too,

Davie. I got twenty-five cents a quart for your berries, and Professor Johnson, up at the Academy, says he will give you a dollar if you will show him the patch, and let him get a few bushes. He won't tell a soul, and he won't pick a berry. He wants only a few bushes for his garden."

It was lucky that Owen did not see David that evening; for his chin was up so high, and his chest was out so far, that Owen might have forgotten his mother's warning.

Owen felt that one of his chief duties in life was to save other boys from that pride which goeth before a fall, and his method was not always gentle.

As David was being wrapped in his blanket that night, he looked up at Dan Martin with a happy smile.

"They can't call me a quitter, can they?" he asked.

“A quitter? Well, I don’t know what they may call you, Davie, but if they do call you a quitter, you tell ’em to come to me, and I’ll say:

“Who picked the biggest blueberries ever found in Rabbit Hollow?”

CHAPTER XIV

GRAY DAYS AND GOLD

The next day proved that Owen was a good prophet. A light rain fell from a warm sky. It was perfect weather for trout fishing.

Owen was not delighted at first when he found that David had a line and hooks, to fish with all by himself.

"Oh, have a heart, Dan!" he said. "I can't spend all day getting his hook out of the bushes."

But when Dan Martin found that the line was much too long, and David readily agreed to give Owen half, he started off with his little pupil in high good humor.

Even Owen did not hide his pleasure at owning a real silk trout line.

So they spent a happy day. Owen was tempted to say things his mother had forbidden, when he had to stop and get David's line out of the bushes along Willow Brook, or when David stepped on stones that splashed into the water; but he only laughed.

He caught eight trout, most of them large and fat. David, after almost giving up hope, caught a big one also.

The boys were old friends when they returned, wet and happy, in the gray dusk, to the little cabins.

Owen gave David one of his trout, and that made a good supper for Dan Martin also.

The cabin was bright and cheerful. Dan had spent the day setting his house in order.

He had borrowed a lamp from the



David caught a big one also

Collins, and had got more bedclothes in the village, from a good woman who knew him.

On the shelf above the stove were sugar and flour and cocoa, and little bags and boxes of other things he would use in cooking.

It was only a tiny cottage, but it was bright and clean. It seemed to the tired, happy boy, as he pushed back his plate, and patted his stomach, and looked over at the fir bed he had made himself, that there never was a home so cozy, never a place so wonderful as Rabbit Hollow.

The next day was bright again, so the boys had an early swim, and then all went after berries.

David was proud to show Dan Martin and Owen where he found his berries, and to guide Professor Johnson to the place, so he might get his plants.

The clearing was not wide, but the berries were so large, and grew in such numbers, that they picked more than a hundred quarts in that same spot.

The bright days of August flew fast away. Each day brought some new adventure, and a new experience for the little truant.

When the berries on the plain grew scarce, they crossed the river in the boat, and went up the mountain.

On rainy days they went fishing, or played in a hut they had made on the lower slopes, under some great spruce trees, on Shadow Mountain.

From wandering about in sun and rain, half dressed and barefoot most of the time, David became tough and tanned and freckled.

Under the care of Owen, he learned to swim, and then to dive. It was a big day for him when he finally stood on

the springboard and took a high dive, clean and straight into the pool.

Mrs. Collins soon learned to love this stormy, determined lad like a child of her own. She watched Owen, to see that he was not too rough, but she let the boys fight it out in their own way.

As the days went on, David learned to do his share, and demand no more than his share, or to expect the rough side of Owen's hand and tongue, which he was sure to get.

In the cabin Mrs. Collins showed Dan Martin how to plan food that was not all blueberry toast, or all blueberry pan-cakes, so David grew big and strong in the mountain air.

One thing was certain: David was the cleanest boy in the state. With hopeful eyes he watched the Christmas soap grow thinner and thinner, when suddenly a new cake took its place.

“It’s wonderful soap, too, Davie,” said Dan Martin, with sparkling eye. “I paid thirty cents for it.”

“Old Soapsuds,” declared Joe Collins one day, “was born with a cake of soap in his mouth, that is a fact.”

CHAPTER XV

DAVID GOES SHOPPING

"School begins tomorrow. How old are you?"

Owen and David were walking down toward Rabbit Hollow, with a few quarts of late blueberries, one golden day early in September.

"I'm nearly eight."

"Ever been to school?"

"No, not yet."

"Well, you'll have to go now, you're over seven," said Owen.

"Why?"

"Mr. Chase will make you go. He's the superintendent, and he knows everybody over seven. If you don't

go to school he'll come and take you himself in his car.

"Last year Tony Saborsky wanted to stay out, so when Mr. Chase came to find him, he hid in the big rain-water barrel, back of the house.

"Mr. Chase knocked on the side of the barrel and said: 'Come, little rain-drop, we must drip you into the River of Knowledge.' So now we all call Tony Little Raindrop."

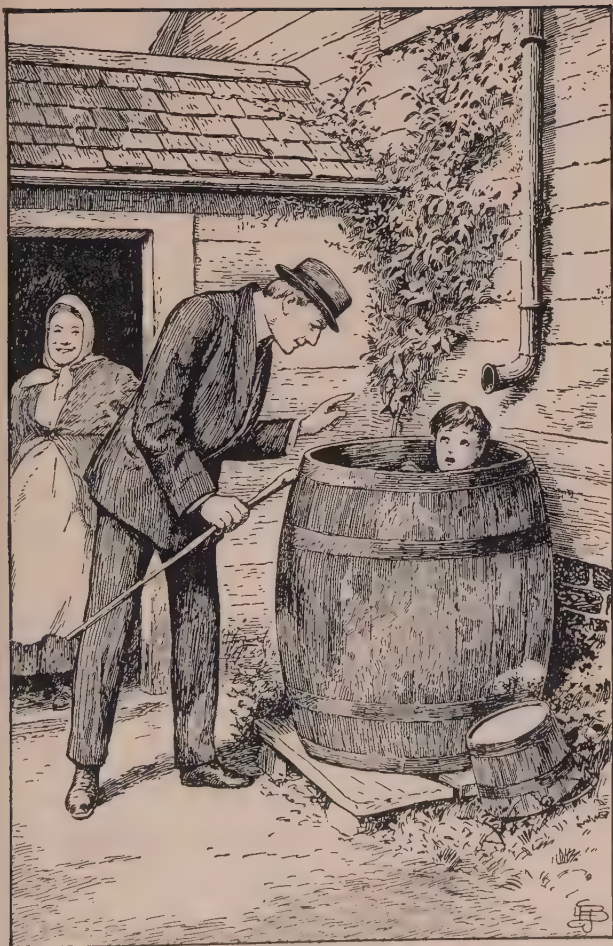
"Mr. Chase doesn't know that I live here. He never saw me."

"Don't worry. He would find you if you lived back of Shadow Mountain. He calls us his little senators. He says perhaps every boy can't be President, but we all surely can be senators."

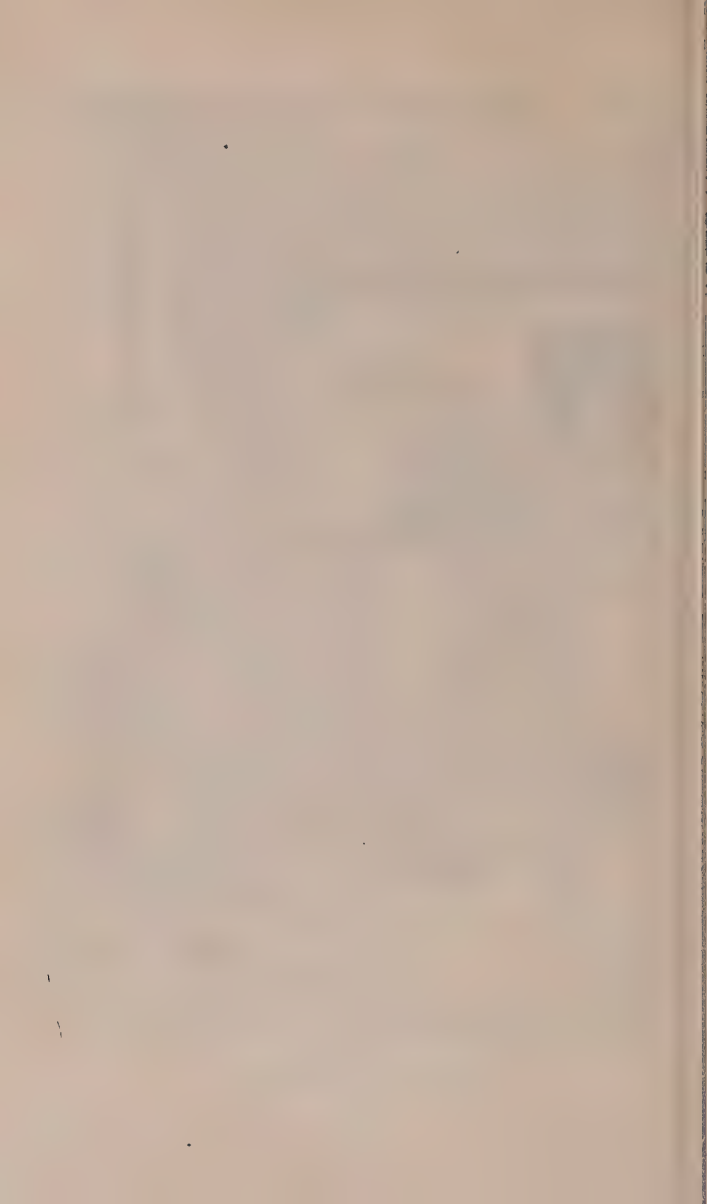
"Oh dear!" sighed David.

"What's the matter? Don't you want to be a senator?"

"I don't want to go to school."



Come, little raindrop



“Of course you want to go to school. It’s great down at our school.

“You’ll have Miss Cushing. She’s a real sport. I wouldn’t stay home for two black cats and a piece of flypaper. Last year I was sick a week, and had to stay out. I grew so lonesome I planned my funeral.”

David looked round him.

The tansy, by the old stone wall, was now a mass of green and gold. Along the roadside, purple asters had gathered like a gown about the goldenrod.

The pasture, sloping to the quiet stream, had said goodbye to summer. The sweet fern, tinged with copper, the fearless arnica, peeping with bright yellow eye through clumps of everlasting, the rich red tints of berry bushes, all blended in the soft warm glow that says, “ ’Tis autumn.”

A maple by the river, turned weeks

before its time, flashed crimson flame against the rich and glossy green of fir and cedar.

The mountains rose beyond, with yellow birch, the white and green of poplars, and flecks of red among the mountain maples, that promised to be all ablaze with the next frost.

And over all the soft September sky, clear blue above, but near the earth, along the stream and plain, filled with a golden haze.

How could a boy leave this to go and shut himself within four walls?

"Oh dear!" sighed David.

"You won't say 'oh dear,'" said Owen, "when you have been to school a while."

"I can't go swimming."

"Of course you can go swimming, as long as you want to go. But the water gets too cold in a week or so. You'll be glad to quit.

“We have books down at school that tell you everything. Wait till you see the big geographies, with pictures of all over the world; and football at recess, oh boy!”

“Would they let me play football?” asked David.

“Of course, the tinies have a team. You could play on that.”

“Oh,” said David, as they started on again. “Perhaps I should like it.”

“There comes Mr. Chase now,” cried Owen, as a car drove toward them.

“Hello, there!” called Mr. Chase, stopping by the grass. “Are you all ready for school, Owen?”

“You said it, Mr. Chase,” replied Owen. “I’ve earned a lot of cash this summer, picking berries.”

“Good! that is just like you. Who is this lad?” Mr. Chase looked at David.

"It is David Martin, Dan Martin's boy. He is going to school, too."

"All the better for us. Have you been vaccinated, David?"

"No, sir." David shook his head.

"Well, you must be vaccinated before you can go to school. Doctor Grindle usually does that for school children. Owen will show you where he lives. You will look after him, won't you, Owen, when you come to school?"

"Yes, sir, I'll take him down town tomorrow," called Owen, as their Superintendent drove away.

On the way home, the two boys talked of school, of the books and games, and Miss Cushing.

The more David learned about it, the more eager he became to join the other children.

"Can't I go tomorrow?" he asked, as they approached the cabins.

“Not till you are vaccinated. They won’t let anybody in till he has been vaccinated.”

“Owen, Owen!” Mrs. Collins came to the door and looked out. “Owen, what are you doing now?”

“Nothing,” said Owen.

“Oh dear, how you do grow to be like your father!” she replied. “I wish you would get me up some wood for the cook stove.”

“All right,” he returned. “I’ll take you down to Doctor Grindle’s tomorrow afternoon, David,” he added, as he started for the door.

“School? School?” replied Dan Martin, when David told him what Owen had said. “Why, of course you must go to school. I hadn’t thought of that.”

As he spoke, Mrs. Collins came to their door.

“Owen says that David is starting school tomorrow, Dan,” she said. “I thought I would run over and see what he had to wear.”

“Sure enough. He must have clothes and shoes, to go to school.”

David looked at his pants, and boots, and stockings. He had given them no thought before. Now he saw that they would never do for school.

“You must have some money from the berries,” said Mrs. Collins.

“Yes, I have money enough, but—” Dan Martin hesitated, and looked around the room.

“I’ll tell you a secret,” he whispered in Mrs. Collins’ ear. “I never bought him any clothes. I don’t believe I know how. Now if you would only go down to Foster’s with him, and pick them out, it would be grand.”

“I don’t believe I would have the

time today." Mrs. Collins shook her head. She was very busy.

David reached up and took her hand, looking into her face.

"I will cut you whole lots of wood if you will," he said.

"Couldn't you wait another day?"

"No. You see all the other children are going, and I might die, I'd be so lonesome here without them."

"My suds! That would be terrible. Well, you are a pretty good boy, and if you will play with the babies and keep them quiet for a while, till I get the work done, I guess I can go down with you this afternoon."

"I will put the money right in your hand," said Dan Martin. "Now, Davie, run along and help her all you can."

As soon as they were gone, Dan Martin shut the door. Then he went to the iron bed. Unscrewing the two

knobs that capped the head posts, he lifted out the hollow bar that ran between them.

“Presto,” he said, as he took a slender stick, and pushed it through the hollow bar he had taken from the bed.

“There is my friend Bill, the best friend I have in the world. One dollar bill, two dollar bill, five dollar bill.”

Dan Martin chuckled, as he picked up the money he had pushed out onto the floor.

He counted out fifteen dollars, and then stuffed the rest back into the hollow bar with the slender stick.

In a minute the bar and knobs were in place again, and Dan Martin was putting potatoes on to boil.

David proved to be a good nurse for the babies, so that afternoon he and Mrs. Collins started together on a shopping trip.

"There is fifteen dollars. Will that be enough?" said Dan Martin.

"Yes, plenty. Can you spare that much?" asked Mrs. Collins.

"Oh, of course. David earned all that and more," replied Dan Martin.

"It is his money."

On the way along the autumn road, David looked up at Mrs. Collins.

"Did he say that I earned all that money myself, picking berries?"

"Yes," she replied. "Owen told me, that after you learned to stick to it, you were a right smart picker."

David took a deep breath and held his head up high. Fifteen dollars for a new suit, and he had earned every cent himself. He was a right smart picker.

At Foster's they found a neat gray suit for eight dollars, a pair of tan shoes at four dollars, and had plenty to buy stockings and a new blouse.

"Here is a cap," said Mr. Foster, "that you can have for fifty cents."

"Look here," returned Mrs. Collins. "If a little boy came into my store and spent all this money, that he earned every cent of himself, I would give him a cap as a present."

"Well, perhaps I ought to give him one," laughed Mr. Foster. "Here, sonny, let me find one that fits you."

So David was ready to begin school, clean and new from top to toe.

As they returned through the village, David stopped before a large yellow house. There was a sign on the lawn, painted in black, with gold letters.

"Is that Doctor Grindle's house?" he asked.

"Yes, that is where he lives."

"Oh," replied David, pausing for a moment, as if he would go in.

Then he went on again, his head

higher than ever, eager to try his new clothes, and show them to Dan Martin.

As he went down the path to the little cabin, a wisp of smoke was floating from the chimney, and drifting slowly down into the blue mist of the valley.

The sun had set, and the outline of the hills stood clear and sharp against the glow of the golden sky.

The smell of broiling meat filled his eager nostrils.

"Ship ahoy!" called Dan Martin, putting his head through the door. "It's a secret, Davie," he said in a loud whisper. "We have bacon and pancakes for supper."

It was hard to tell which one was more happy over the new clothes, the boy or the man.

As soon as supper was done, Dan Martin put a kettle full of water on the stove, over a crackling fire.

"Now, little professor," he cried, "we will have a regular bath, and then try on the new suit."

"I went in swimming yesterday," said David.

"A swim is one thing; a bath is another thing. Look at those knees. Oh, Davie! You wouldn't go to school with knees like that!"

David complained no more. The idea of going to school had grown in his mind during the day, and he agreed that his knees were rather tanned, as he put it.

"You do look just grand, Davie, grand," exclaimed the man, when David was dressed at last in his new clothes.

"The coat is too big, isn't it?" asked David, lifting his arms.

"Just right! Just right! You're growing like a spring willow. Mrs. Collins knows how to do shopping."

The clothes were all hung neatly on a row of pegs that Dan Martin had fastened to the wall in the bedroom, and David snuggled down into the sweet fir bed, fragrant with the extra odor of scented soap.

“Did you say I earned the suit all myself?” he asked, as Dan Martin tucked him into bed.

“Yes, sir, every cent, and more too,” replied Dan Martin.

Under the bedclothes David doubled up his right arm, and felt of it with his left hand.

“I have a pretty good big muscle already,” he said to himself, as he listened to the cricket concert, that sang him off to sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

VULCANIZED

The next morning Owen Collins was building the fire in the cook stove, when some one rapped on the door.

"Hullo, Dan," he cried, when he answered the knock. "What are you doing up at this hour? I thought you were a sound sleeper."

Dan peered in through the open door, and looked all about.

"Where is David?" he asked.

"How should I know? Must I watch him all night, as well as all day?"

"What is the matter, Dan?" asked Mrs. Collins, coming to the door.

"David is gone," he said.

"Gone?"

“Yes. When I awoke this morning, he was gone. I looked all 'round. He dressed in his new suit, and—he is gone. I can't find him.”

By this time all the family had gathered at the door.

Owen went out with little John. They called until the echo from the mountain rang through the still air, but no voice answered.

Dan Martin stood there, looking all about, with a queer, vacant stare. He rubbed his head, and talked half to himself. It was a hard blow.

“Come, Dan, sit down with us and have a cup of coffee. You look faint.”

Mrs. Collins drew him into the kitchen, and pushed up a chair.

“No, no,” said Dan Martin, drawing back. “I don't feel hungry.”

“All the more reason why you should eat. You will be sick if you don't eat.

Then who will care for David? Smile up, now. We will find him soon."

So Dan Martin took the empty chair, and joined them in their breakfast, watching through the open doorway as he ate, and listening for sounds that might be footsteps of the missing boy.

While they were eating there, and wondering what could have made David run away, a little boy in a new suit was walking up the steps that led to Doctor Grindle's house.

He was flushed, and out of breath. His eyes were bright from walking in the morning air.

With a hand that shook a little, he pressed the button by the door. Just above the button was a hole in the door frame, as large as a silver dollar.

No one came to the door, so he pressed the button again.

Then a voice came to his ear.

"Who is it? What do you wish?"

The boy looked up, startled.

"Who is it?" asked the voice again.

The sound came through the hole in the door. It was a speaking tube.

"It is me," said David.

"Oh, it is you, is it? What can I do for you?"

"I want to be vulcanized."

"What?"

The voice sounded loud in the tube. The boy heard some one laughing.

"I am David Martin. I want to be vulcanized, so I can go to school."

"Oh, so you are a boy, are you? I thought you must be an automobile tire. I guess you want to be vaccinated, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, that is it. I forgot the word."

"Well, you will have to wait a few minutes. Sit down on the steps."

David sat on the steps, and waited what seemed to him a long, long time.

At last the door opened, and jolly old Doctor Grindle took him inside to his office.

"There," he said, as he tied a white bandage round David's arm. "You are ready for school now. If you keep on getting up as early as this, you may be President before you know it."

David shook his head.

"I wouldn't expect to be President," he replied, "but I might be a senator."

"No doubt, not the least doubt in the world," laughed Doctor Grindle, as he led him to the door.

Breakfast was over. The morning chores were done. Dan Martin had gone back to his little cottage, to get his hat and coat, before setting out in search of David.

Owen was spitting down his tousled

hair with a wet brush, when little John ran in from the woodpile.

"I fink David is coming back," he cried, waving his arms.

All ran to the door. Sure enough! There was David, in his new suit, hurrying down the lane.

"You surely do beat a sky-rocket when you start, David," called Mrs. Collins. "Where have you been?"

"I had to be vaccinated," panted David. "I wanted to start school today with Owen."

"Vaccinated, at half past six in the morning! Doctor Grindle must have blessed you. Was he up?"

"Oh, no; but he got up. He knew I had to go to school."

"Well, laddie, it takes more than a piece of pink string to hold you back. Hurry along now. Dan Martin is half crazy from worry."

Poor Dan Martin wiped the tears from his eyes, when he saw his boy back again.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going, Davie?" he said, trying to be stern. "I have looked everywhere. I'm half sick."

"Why, I didn't need to wake you. I was coming right back. You feel better now, don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose I do; but the next time you run off without telling anyone, you'll let me know, won't you, Davie? Promise, now."

David promised, and sat down to a very quick breakfast. Then away he ran to join the children starting off to school in the bright sunshine.

He hoped that Doctor Grindle would say nothing about the mistake he had made, but the jolly old Doctor never forgot a good joke.

That minute he was in the barber shop, telling Sam Harris all about it.

“I’m bound,” he chuckled, slapping his knee, “if I don’t tell his teacher that he is well vulcanized, and she ought to give him a good blowing up.”

CHAPTER XVII

SHADOWS ON THE PATH

School started happily for David, in spite of the knocks he got from the other boys, always ready to put a strange lad in his place, and teach him to be humble.

Miss Cushing proved to be everything that Owen had promised. She was bright, and kind, and clever. Her blue eyes saw all that went on, and her tongue told not half what she saw. This was one reason why the children liked her so much.

In the very first week of school she saw that one little boy could not sit very still, and paid more attention to the other children than he did to her.

“Never mind,” she thought, “he has been wandering over Rabbit Hollow, free as a thistledown. I will give him a chance to get used to his new life.”

“So, while David soon came to love her as much as Owen did, he tried her patience in many ways.

He found football, and robber baron, and tag, at recess, wonderful sport. To be playing in the midst of so many children of his own age thrilled him.

He was strong, and fleet, and his training with Owen had taught him to play fair and do his part.

In Rabbit Hollow there were blackberries, and wild grapes, after the last blueberries had gone. Then chestnuts and shellbarks came along.

When the sun set behind the ridge of Shadow Mountain, on the bright autumn evenings, and the white smoke trailed over the river against the dark

blue of the valley, he would sit in the kitchen, while Dan Martin put on the sticks of dry birch wood, and fried some bacon, or broiled a bit of meat for their supper.

There was much to do, and much to make a boy happy, but there was growing in his heart a feeling he had never known before.

He wanted something more and more. He felt lonely, and would sit and look out through the little window, now mended with clear new glass, silent and dreamy.

The approach of Thanksgiving gave him new interests, and filled his mind with fresh pleasures.

"You tell Dan Martin that you are both coming to have Thanksgiving dinner with us," said Mrs. Collins one day, as she passed the door.

"We shall have a turkey, and Dan

can bring his share of the dinner if he wants to," she added, as David ran off to carry the glad news.

It had been a good harvest, and the Thanksgiving dinner was a grand feast. It seemed impossible that the turkey and potato and squash and turnip and onions and cranberry sauce and mince pie and apple pie and squash pie could all be cooked in such a tiny cottage; but Mrs. Collins did things like magic.

Everything was cooked to the queen's taste, and eaten till a mouse would need spectacles to find the crumbs.

After dinner they played games till they were tired. Then Mrs. Collins read them a story about a man who played he was a ragman. He dressed in old clothes and put his little boy into a big bag.

Then, at dusk, he went to the door and knocked.

“What do you want?” asked his wife, coming to the door.

“Any rags?”

“No.”

She went to shut the door, when he pushed in, with the bag on his back.

She was frightened, but he said, in a strange voice:

“Lady, in this bag I have a wonderful gift. Cook my supper. Let me sit by your fire and be warm. Then I will give you all this bag contains, and it will make you happy.”

“No, no!” she replied. “Please go away.” She was afraid. She wanted nothing from his dirty old bag, she was sure of that.

“Very well,” he said, turning to go. “But before I leave, look just once within the bag, for you know not what is there.”

He opened the bag a little; she

peeped within; and there was the face of her own little boy smiling out.

Then the father took off his old hat, and they all laughed, as the little boy crawled out of the bag and threw himself into his mother's arms.

David listened to the story without moving. His eyes were fixed on the lower ridges of the mountains far down the river.

"Read it again," he said, when it was finished, and she laid down the book.

"Some day I will read it to you again," said Mrs. Collins. "I have work to do now. Some rainy day you come in, and I'll read it for you."

David and Dan Martin went back to their tiny cottage, at the end of the happy day.

"What did you like best of all, Davie?" he asked, as he tucked him into bed.

"The story," replied David. "When I grow up I think I will write stories just like that."

He remembered the promise Mrs. Collins had given, and the first rainy afternoon David hurried home and demanded the story. Poor Mrs. Collins had to read it twice, so he could learn it by heart.

The Monday after Thanksgiving Miss Cushing decided that it was time she gave David more help.

"He loves me. I can see that," she said to herself; "but he must learn to pay attention, and do his work."

She spoke to David several times that morning; but he soon forgot.

At last she saw him whispering to Frank Sherman, who sat behind him. She looked sternly at David.

"Any little boy who whispers, may stay after school with me," she said.

Within two minutes David was whispering again.

“David, you may stay after school this afternoon. You may remain in your seat when the others pass out.”

She was much surprised to see the smile that passed over David's face, but he whispered no more. He spent many minutes gazing out the window when he should have been at work, but he did nothing to annoy her.

That afternoon, when all the other children had filed out, David remained behind, watching through the window.

Miss Cushing worked quietly at her desk a few minutes. Then she called David to her.

She put her arm around him.

“Don't you love Miss Cushing, David?” she asked.

“Of course,” replied David, looking up into her blue eyes.

"Then, if you love me, why did you whisper when I asked you not to whisper?"

David paused a moment.

"You didn't ask me not to whisper."

He had taken her hand in his, as he stood close beside her.

"Why, David, what do you mean?"

"No'm, you didn't. You said, 'Any little boy that whispers may stay after school with me.'"

Miss Cushing remembered the smile on his face when she had spoken to him in class.

"David Martin!" she exclaimed.

"Do you mean that you *want* to stay after school with me?"

"Why, of course," returned David, looking up at her. "Every day I have to march out with the other children. I could clean the boards, and dust the erasers."

“Why?” he added, as she looked down at him with a mist in her blue eyes. “Do you care?”

Miss Cushing smiled.

“I think it is lovely to have a young man want to stay with me,” she said with a roguish look, “but I think you ought to be out doors, and go home.”

“Oh, I wait for Owen to get out, every day. Couldn’t I stay till then?”

Every day, after that, David stayed till the grammar school was dismissed, and was a janitor for Miss Cushing.

“There is something about that boy I don’t understand,” thought Miss Cushing, a little later, as he hugged her, and ran off to join Owen after school. “He tries hard to please me, and does all I ask. But his mind is far away. Something troubles him. Perhaps I can find out what it is.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SHADOWS GROW DEEPER

One morning, when the pupils went out to play at recess, Wilbur Gilpatrick stayed in the room.

"What is the matter?" asked Miss Cushing; "are you ill?"

"No'm," said Wilbur.

"Please say, 'No, Miss Cushing,'" she corrected.

"Yes'm," said Wilbur.

"Yes what?"

"Yes, Miss Cushing."

"Well, why are you staying in?"

Wilbur hung his head.

"Come," she said, lifting his chin, "what is the trouble?"

"I'm afraid," he explained.

"What are you afraid of?"

"George Gould."

"Why, George Gould is a good boy. He won't hurt you."

"Yes, he will."

"What makes you think so?"

Wilbur waited a moment in silence.

"Now, Wilbur, you're not afraid of me. You tell me all about it."

"Well, I was out in the yard this morning. George Gould was running after the football, and he fell over me." He was mad. He said:

"'Oh, you're always in the way. If you come out here again I'll walk on your face; and that is no lie! You just vanish!'

"I wasn't doing anything, either," he added. "He didn't look where he was going."

Miss Cushing tried to hide a smile.

"Now, Wilbur," she coaxed, "you

know he didn't mean that. He was vexed, and spoke before he thought. You run along now. He won't hurt you. I know he won't."

"Yes, he will," replied Wilbur, staying where he was.

"I didn't suppose that you would be afraid like that."

"Would you like to have George Gould walk on your face?" asked Wilbur.

"No, I shouldn't. I don't believe he would walk on my face."

"Would you like to be vanished?"

"Oh, that is nothing. Vanish just means to run away, to go out of sight."

"I don't care," replied Wilbur.

He did not move, so Miss Cushing said no more.

She went up stairs and spoke with Miss Grant, who had George in her room.

After recess, when the children were

all back in their seats, George Gould appeared at the door.

"Come right in, George," said Miss Cushing with a smile.

George came in, and stood first on one foot and then on the other.

"George," began Miss Cushing, "Wilbur Gilpatrick was afraid to go out on the playground today because he thought that you would—well, that you would hurt him."

The children giggled, and George looked uneasy.

"I think it would make matters more happy if you would tell Wilbur that you didn't mean what you said."

"Yes'm—yes, Miss Cushing," George stammered.

"You will be glad to have Wilbur out to play, won't you?"

"Yes, Miss Cushing."

George was as red as the station

master's handkerchief, and a look he gave Frank Sherman, who was giggling, promised bad luck for Frank on the way home.

"Now, Wilbur, I want you to come and shake hands with George. Then you will be friends again, and you won't be afraid any more."

Wilbur came forward, still very much afraid of George. They shook hands, and George went back to his room muttering the things he would like to do to little birds that went and told teacher all they heard.

"There is one little radio," said George, as he mounted the stairs, "who does too much broadcasting 'round here, altogether. If he doesn't quit telling on me, I'll lay my hand on his loud-speaker."

Miss Cushing thought, as George went out:

"That was rather tough on George, but he is too fond of talking. It will do him good."

Wilbur Gilpatrick was thinking:

"I guess I had better run right home tonight, as fast as I can. He looked cross, even if he did shake hands."

He remembered with comfort that this was Friday. By Monday he might be forgotten or forgiven.

"Now, children," said Miss Cushing, "I want this to be a lesson to all of you. The other day I heard Eddie Babb tell Frank Sherman that he would knock his head off.

"That was a silly thing to say, and a naughty thing to say. He wouldn't do such a thing.

"What did you say, Frank?" she added, hearing him speak.

Frank Sherman hung his head.

"He said that Eddie couldn't do it

if he tried," explained Minnie Russell, always ready to help.

"Please let me do the talking, Frank. We all know that Eddie didn't mean what he said. George Gould didn't mean what he said. Every day I hear people say they are going to do this, and going to do that, when they never mean it.

"If you will stop a minute, before you speak, you can save much trouble."

David Martin raised his hand.

"What is it, David?"

"If any one said she would make you eat a bar of laundry soap, would she mean it?"

"Certainly not. Whoever heard of such a thing? Who said she would make you eat a bar of laundry soap, David?"

"Oh, no one."

Miss Cushing went on with the work,

but David looked out of the window. His thoughts were far away.

The children in David's group were busy with their desk work an hour later, when Miss Cushing heard a sound that she could not quite make out.

"What is that?" she asked, looking up from the reading class.

"It's David Martin. He's crying," said Minnie Russell.

That evening Miss Cushing went home with a headache.

"If I didn't know that children were little angels in human flesh," she said to herself, "I should give up. I never had such a crazy day in all my life. Why do children—I mean little angels—behave so?"

She sat by her window and looked out at the gray sky that seemed to promise snow for the morrow.

"David Martin sits and cries half

an hour for no reason at all. Whoever heard of a child crying for nothing? It is no use to ask him. You get the same answer. He doesn't know why he is crying.

“Why does he sit and look through the window, with his mind a thousand miles away? He doesn't know.

“Something is wrong with that child, and I'm going to find out what it is.”

CHAPTER XIX

HIS MOTHER'S FACE

At home Dan Martin had also noticed that something was wrong with David, but other problems were taking up his mind at this season.

How should they live? Summer was over. Berries were gone. He had found some wood to chop, here and there; but work was scarce and help was plenty for rough labor.

He would look at David in a nervous way, as if something was in his mind too. He was better now, than he had been in the summer, and the clearer his mind became, the more he thought and worried.

That afternoon Miss Cushing had kept David more than an hour, hoping

that he could tell her what ailed him. But though he put his little arms about her, and snuggled closer to her than usual, he told her nothing.

At home Dan Martin noticed that he was late, for David seldom played on the way home from school.

"I guess I'll go down to meet him," said Dan Martin. "He'll be lonely. It will soon be getting dark."

As he went down the road he saw an automobile, standing on one side, with a man bending over the engine.

As he approached, the man looked up. It was Mr. Chase.

"Hello, Dan," he called out. "Where are you bound?"

"I am going to meet Davie. He's late tonight."

"I would take you along, if I could make this car behave. It acts worse than a calf on a rope."

Dan Martin bent over the engine. His hands passed along the rods and wires under the hood.

"Does she spit and backfire?" he asked, turning to Mr. Chase.

"Yes, that is just what she does. Do you know about engines?"

"Yes, most engines. The wire to your timer is worn, so the circuit is broken. Have you a piece of tape?"

Mr. Chase fumbled in his tool case.

"Yes, here is a roll of tape that we can use," he said.

Dan Martin took the tape and wrapped it closely about the wire.

"Now try her," he suggested.

Phut, phut, phut! She started off like a true Ford.

"Well, that didn't take you long," exclaimed Mr. Chase. "Look here! Do you know about steam boilers?"

"Oh, yes," chuckled Dan Martin.

"I know steam boilers by their middle name. We are good friends."

"I guess you are just the man I am looking for. Grandpa Griggs is sick, and I can't find a janitor. Don't you want to try it?"

Dan Martin drew back a step, and passed his hand over his forehead.

"Do you think I could do it?"

"I believe you are just the man for that work. We will pay you fourteen dollars a week."

Thoughts ran through Dan Martin's mind. With this money he would actually be rich. He could come home each night with David. He could see him through the day, and warm his lunch at the boiler fire.

"I would like to try it." His face lit up with a happy smile.

"Good for you! Get in now, and we will go down and look things over."



Dan Martin was to be janitor

David was just leaving school, as they arrived, so he waited till Dan had talked over his duties with Mr. Chase. Then they went home together.

There was joy in Rabbit Hollow when they learned that Dan Martin was to be janitor.

David and Dan Martin were glad, because it meant comfort and plenty for them. The other children were happy because they knew Dan Martin's kindly nature.

"Hooray!" cried Owen. "You'll let us play tag in the basement, rainy days, won't you, Dan?"

Dan Martin smiled. He would do almost anything for boys.

With this new interest to fill his thoughts, David was bright and happy in his daily work.

"There!" thought Miss Cushing. "David was homesick. It was hard

to leave the fields and woods, to be shut in a school room. He will be happy now."

But the cloud soon settled on David's face once more.

Christmas plans were in the air.

"My father is going to give me a pair of skates, if I have my Bible verse perfect every Sunday," said Tom Bryant.

"I'm going to have a new sled, and a pair of overshoes with four buckles," added Wilbur Gilpatrick.

Other boys told what they were going to have.

In every home the gifts were hidden with great care. In every home, every boy seemed to know every hiding place as well as he knew the time for dinner.

That night David hardly spoke to anyone on the way home.

At supper he sat idle, barely tasting his food.

Poor Dan Martin could not eat his own supper.

"Are you sick, Davie?" he asked.

"No."

Is anything the matter?"

"No."

"Don't you like this nice bacon? I fried it just as you like to have it."

"It's all right."

"Well, eat a little cake."

"I don't feel hungry."

Dan Martin fretted and worried.

"I'll give him some work to do. That will cheer him up," he decided.

So Dan Martin got out a pile of old newspapers, that he had brought up from school.

"Will you help me clean up the shelves, Davie?" he asked. "I will wash them if you will fold the papers."

David set to work folding the papers, in a dreamy way.

Suddenly he started, and gazed with staring eyes at a paper in his lap.

The face of a woman looked up at him from the paper he was about to fold and lay on the shelf.

The beauty of the face was soft with sadness. The full lips that should have smiled, were drooping, as if in pain. Her eyes, that gazed straight into his, seemed to shine with the light that beams from eyes which often bathe in tears. It is the quiet light of autumn mornings, after rain.

David sat like a stone image, gazing at the picture. If he had learned to read, the words below the picture would have stirred him still more deeply than the face before him.

(Mrs. Robert Baker, of Newton, refuses to believe that her boy, Alden Baker, is dead. After tracing many clues, the police think he must have

been drowned in the river, where his shoes were left. Mrs. Baker declares that he is still alive, and will not give up the search till he is found.)

This print meant nothing to the lad, who sat and looked at the face of his own mother. His heart almost stopped beating as those soft, sad eyes looked into his.

Dan Martin glanced over, and saw him sitting, still and silent.

"Come, Davie," he said, trying to be gay. "The Sand Man is here. I will finish the shelves. You wash up now, and gallop off to dreamland with the good old Sand Man. You'll feel gay as a butterfly in the morning."

David woke from his dream with a start. He took some hot water from the kettle, and washed his face, and neck, and hands; and brushed his teeth.

Even in his day-dream, he left no

spots unwashed, for Dan Martin, day by day, had trained him till it had become a habit.

“Good night, sleep tight; in the morning gay and bright,” sang Dan Martin, as he tucked David under the blankets.

“Dear me,” he said to himself, as he went back to his work, “I fear the child is sick, after all. I’ll take him down to Doctor Grindle tomorrow, if he acts like this.”

Dan Martin finished the work. As soon as he was sure that David was asleep, he went to bed; but his slumber was not deep, for he, also, had troubles in his mind.

They had two beds now, and he had put David’s little cot into the kitchen, where the boy would have the heat of the stove to keep him warm.

He was lying in his bedroom, in the

black night, when he heard a sound. He roused and listened.

In the quiet home he heard the sound of sobs.

Rising from his bed, Dan Martin went into the kitchen.

David was weeping on his pillow.

The man put his hand on the lad's cheek, all wet with tears, and on his hot forehead. He stroked it gently.

The sobs grew quiet.

"What is the matter, Davie?" he asked in a gentle tone.

"Nothing," replied David, with a little catch in his voice.

"Nothing! Dear me, the house is full of it. I guess my head is full of it, too. I'm so mixed up. Be a good boy now, Davie, and go to sleep."

Dan Martin sat beside him, holding one small hand in his, till David fell asleep once more. Then he went back

to his bed, and lay there, wondering what was the matter.

“I surely will have to take him to Doctor Grindle,” he said to himself. “He must be sick. He never used to act like this.”

CHAPTER XX

DANGER

The next morning David woke from a deep sleep. He was refreshed, and brighter than he had been for several days.

“Well, here is my little sparrow back in the nest again,” laughed Dan Martin, as David passed his plate for more bacon and toast. “I guess we won’t have to see Doctor Grindle, after all.”

So they started off to school in good spirits, in the sharp, clear December morning, along the frozen road.

As they drew near the school, Dan Martin gradually became more quiet, and walked faster. David could hardly keep up.

"I can't go so fast as that," called David, out of breath.

"Oh, I forgot! Of course you can't," returned Dan Martin, reaching for David's hand.

He tried to whistle, and seem happy, but soon became silent again.

David looked up at him, and watched his face.

While Dan Martin had been fretting over David, the boy had also noticed that something was wrong with his kind, queer friend.

Dan Martin would mutter to himself, as he went about his work in the little cottage. Now and then he would frown, when he thought that David was not looking.

On the edge of the town they met Mr. Chase, driving out to some village schools. He stopped, as he saw Dan Martin hold up his hand.

"It is going to be sharp weather, Mr. Chase. Did they plan to do anything about the boiler?" he asked, as Mr. Chase drew up.

Mr. Chase frowned, and thought a moment, before he replied.

"No, Dan," he said. "They say the boiler is all right. You needn't be afraid of the boiler."

Dan Martin shook his head. "They think I am crazy. I know what they think. Do you think I am crazy, Mr. Chase?"

"No, Dan Martin. I know you are not crazy."

"Well, I'll admit I am queer about some things, but not about boilers."

He drew a deep breath, and pointed his finger at Mr. Chase.

"That boiler is going to blow up, Mr. Chase. It's talking to me every day. The tubes are all clogged, and

the safety valve sticks. I've monkeyed with it, and cleaned it, but still it sticks. It won't work."

"Well, Dan, I don't know what I can do. Mr. Morse is chairman of the board. He took that boiler out of his mill and put it there when the school was built. He says it is all right."

"He doesn't know." Dan Martin shook his head again.

"He has owned many boilers in his day, Dan. His children are in the school. I asked the Board about it, and they feel that Mr. Morse ought to know. We don't want to offend him, by acting as if we didn't believe him."

"Don't you think it ought to be cleaned?" Dan Martin looked straight at Mr. Chase.

"If I were boss here, I would have it inspected today, and settle the whole

question. I am a servant, just as much as you are, Dan, and we'll try to get along as well as we can that way."

Mr. Chase drove on, and Dan Martin walked along to school, muttering under his breath, and frowning.

"She's talking to me, Davie. She's talking to me. I don't care what they say," he declared, as they parted at the big front door.

Soon the news spread that Dan Martin was afraid of his boiler. It made quite a joke about town.

"He says that it talks to him," said the barber, as he shaved Doctor Grindle. "He surely must be daffy."

"I wish I knew half as much about engines as Dan Martin does," replied the Doctor, who had known Dan Martin a long time. "These people may think old Soap Suds is daffy, but they'll find out that he knows more than they do."

"You think he may be right, then?" asked Wendell Brown, the grocer.

"Yes, I do. When I listen to your heart, I hear it talking to me. It tells me a true story all about itself. You wouldn't know what it says, but I do. Do you think I am crazy when I say that about your heart?"

"No, of course not."

"I thought you wouldn't. When I listened to your heart last year, it said, 'I am going to blow up. I am going to blow up.' If you hadn't quit drinking coffee, and smoking all the time, it would have blown up, and you would be under the daffodils."

Every one laughed at that, and Wendell Brown moved uneasily in his wooden chair. He had loafed around most of the time, and Doctor Grindle barely saved his life, his heart became so weak.

"Now," the Doctor went on, "Dan

Martin knows boilers just as I know hearts. That boiler is talking to him, as the steam runs through the tubes, and he knows what it says."

"That sounds reasonable to me," said the barber, who always agreed with cash customers. "He knows boiler talk the way you know heart language; that's a fact, Doctor."

So the talk ran on, all through the village. Some thought that old Dan Martin was right, but most of them believed that he was crazy.

The next afternoon Wendell Brown saw Dan Martin carrying a hose to the school over his arm.

"Hey there, Soap Suds," he called. "What are you going to do with that hose, make a new boiler?"

Dan Martin took no offense. "I might need it for the old one," he said with a smile.

"I guess you know boilers, Dan. Come round to the store after school. I have some oranges for Davie."

Wendell Brown had children in the school. He was not happy about the old boiler, but he did not dare to say anything against Mr. Morse, who was one of the richest men in town.

The weather grew colder and colder, as Christmas drew near. Some of the teachers complained because their rooms were cold.

"Well, Marm," Dan Martin would say, "I have a good fire. You come down and see for yourself. I don't dare to put on another pound of steam."

Both David and Dan Martin felt more happy, now that every one knew about the boiler.

David had much to think of, for the children talked about the boiler even more than grown folks.

Dan Martin was relieved, because, if everybody knew about it, he would not be to blame if anything went wrong.

Gradually people came to believe more and more in Dan Martin.

"Say, David, did you hear the news?" asked George Gould, the Monday of Christmas week. "Mr. Morse is going to have a new boiler put in during vacation. We'll get an extra week."

The news spread. Yes, it was true. Every one believed it, and those who had laughed the loudest at Dan Martin seemed the happiest over the news of the new boiler.

Christmas came on Friday. School would close Wednesday night.

Wednesday morning Mr. Morse came with a man to look at the boiler. When they went away, Dan Martin went with them.

It was a bitter morning, and Miss

Custer's room, on the north side, was very chilly.

Miss Custer wondered why it was so cold. At home she ran the furnace herself, and kept a hot fire.

"Please study page sixty-seven in the geography, about Florida," she said. "I will go down and see what is the matter with the furnace."

Miss Custer was vexed. She hastened down to the boiler room. No one was there. A good fire was in the firepot, but the drafts were not opened very far.

"No wonder it is cold!" she exclaimed. "The drafts are not open half wide enough."

With that, she pulled the drafts wide open, and went up stairs.

Soon the steam began to hiss in the tubes, and the radiators grew hotter and hotter.

Down in Miss Cushing's room, on the

south side, it grew so warm that she shut off the steam.

David had finished his writing on the board, and was looking through the window, when he saw Dan Martin coming back to the building.

Suddenly the man started forward. At the same moment the floor shook under David's feet. The building trembled. The glass rattled.

Then there was an awful sound, as if a hundred giants had drawn in their breath together, and said:

“PHOOH!”

CHAPTER XXI

WHO'S BOY ARE YOU?

The floor of the room rose a little, and sank back. All was quiet for a second, before the noise of running feet was heard in the corridors.

Miss Cushing stood before the pupils, white as ivory, but quiet and calm.

"Class, rise," she said. She went to the door, as the children stood.

Miss Cushing pulled at the door to open it. The door would not move. She took hold with both hands, and pulled with all her strength.

The door was stuck fast. Nothing would move it an inch.

Cries sounded outside in the halls. The older pupils were crowding out.

Smoke began to creep up through cracks in the floor.

Miss Cushing went to a window. The double windows were on. Outside these were iron gratings, to protect the glass at recess time.

The smoke grew thicker. The pupils began to cough, but stood in place, waiting for orders.

Miss Cushing hesitated a moment. Then she raised a window. With the window pole she broke the glass in the outer window.

"Come here, children," she said. "You can get the fresh air."

She tried to call for help, but every one was around at the front of the building. No one heard her.

"Never mind," she said, trying to smile. "The men will be here soon, and open the door."

Below them they now heard a new

sound. They were right over the boiler room, and they heard a hissing under the floor, as if steam were escaping from the pipes below.

The room was hot, in spite of the open window, but the smoke seemed to grow less and less.

Then they heard the firebells ring.

There was a noise of calling in the streets.

How long it seemed, waiting there, shut in that stifling room!

Hattie Gray began to cry.

"Don't be afraid, children," called Miss Cushing. "They will have us out in no time now."

She put her arm round Hattie, and held her close.

Some one rattled the doorknob.

Bump! Bump!

Some one was trying to push in.

"Here, bring that axe," called a voice.



Dan Martin saved the school

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The splinters flew. The door gave way and fell in.

"Here they are, all right," shouted a man in the doorway.

It was Foster Higgins, the Chief of the Fire Department.

In another moment the pupils were safely outside. The men brought out their coats and hats, and Miss Cushing tried to find the right one for every child, before they froze.

Just then they heard excited voices.

Foster Higgins came through the door, supporting the form of a man.

"See what I found on the floor of the boiler room," he cried. "He was playing a hose on the red coals."

"Well, Dan Martin," called Wendell Brown. "That is why the fire didn't spread before we came. Your hose was no joke, after all."

"Take him into the teachers' room," ordered Doctor Grindle.

"You make sure that the fire is all out, Foster, and I will fix him up in less than no time."

It took much longer than no time to fix Dan Martin up. He was nearly choked with smoke and steam, and his eyes were blinded, but Doctor Grindle knew his work, and before long Dan was able to stand, and open his eyes.

After trying a few steps, which were not very steady, he declared that he was as well as ever.

"I can sweep up, before I go home," he said.

"Not today," replied Doctor Grindle. "You get your coat, and I will take you and your boy home in my car."

So they bundled Dan Martin in his coat and muffler, and Doctor Grindle drove them up to the little cabin.

"Have you plenty of food and wood for a couple of days?" asked Doctor Grindle, looking about.

"Yes, sir, plenty."

"Well, then, you drink this medicine, and go to bed for a good sleep.

"You, Davie, keep the fire going, and the house warm.

"Don't go out into the cold air till I come tomorrow morning, Dan Martin. If any steam got into your lungs, you may need watching."

So Doctor Grindle saw Dan Martin take the medicine, and get into bed. Then he drove back to the village, leaving David to watch by the side of his hero, who was already sinking into quiet sleep.

Mrs. Collins and Nellie and Owen soon came over to see how things were.

"You run over with Nellie and Owen to the house for lunch," she said to

David. "I will stay here and watch the fire. Dan may need me.

"You may bring my darning, Nellie," she added. "I can do that just as well over here."

David had his lunch, and played with Owen part of the afternoon. Towards dusk he went back to the little cabin.

"There," said Mrs. Collins. "Dan Martin is stirring. He will wake soon. I must go home and make supper for the children. I shall send some soup over, by and by. If he wants anything else you speak right out."

Soon after Mrs. Collins had lighted the lamp, and left David alone, he heard Dan Martin turning in his bed. He went in, and the man opened his eyes.

He saw the lad beside him, and smiled gently.

"Sit down," he said, pointing to a chair near the bed.

David sat in the chair, and the man reached out his hand to take that of the boy beside him.

For some minutes he lay watching David's face, but saying no word.

At last David felt the pressure on his hand grow stronger.

Dan Martin cleared his throat, and raised his head from the pillow.

"David," he said slowly, looking deep into his eyes, "are you really my boy?"

David started. He stared at Dan Martin a moment. He tried to speak. His hands trembled. The tears came flooding from his eyes.

Dan Martin drew him close. The little brown head fell on the spotless pillow beside his cheek, and David burst into a passion of weeping.

For several minutes Dan Martin stroked the brown hair, holding the little hand in his.

Slowly the lad grew quiet. He opened his eyes and looked at the man.

"Then you are not my really truly boy after all," said Dan Martin, with sad eyes.

David shook his head.

"Whose boy are you, then?"

After a little urging, David told him the whole story; how he had run away, and met him, and pretended that he was Dan Martin's boy.

"What a queer little boy you are," smiled Dan Martin. "Did you really believe that Mary would make you eat a bar of soap?"

"Yes, I thought she might, and besides—"

"What besides?"

"I wanted to go home long ago, but I didn't know what to do."

Dan Martin was silent a minute.

"Well, Davie," he said at last. "I

must take you home right away. We can go tomorrow. I think your father and mother must have nearly died from sorrow. Oh, Davie, I know how it feels to lose a little boy! It is terrible."

Dan Martin rose, and washed the tears from David's eyes. Then he stirred the fire, and began to get supper.

"Do you feel all right?" asked the boy, for Dan Martin's face seemed very pale.

"Oh, yes, I am quite well, only—"

David looked up at him and waited.

"Only it is hard to say goodby to a little boy that you love."

David rushed at him, and seized his big rough hand.

"You are not going to say goodby to me," he cried. "You are going to live with me in our big house. There is lots of room, and you can take care of father's automobiles. He has two big

ones. He always said he wished he could find a man that knew how."

Dan Martin shook his head sadly.

"You needn't shake your head. You wait and see. I guess I know my father better than you do."

"All right, Davie, we'll see, we'll see," replied Dan Martin, quickly, as the tears began to gather in David's eyes.

He bent over the stove, so that the lad should not see the tears gathering in his own eyes.

During supper there was a council. What should they do? Whom should they tell?

"Oh, I know what we'll do," cried David, as Dan was trying to plan. "We won't let anybody know. If we do, they will go and tell. We will just get on the train and surprise them."

He looked around to be sure no one was near the door. Then he pulled

Dan Martin's head down so that he might whisper in his ear.

The man listened as the boy went on and whispered his plans.

"Oh, no, Davie, I couldn't do that! I couldn't remember. I would just spoil it all," he said, as the lad finished.

"No you wouldn't. I would tell you every word to say. You could get everything right there in Newton. I know just the place."

Dan Martin tried to say no, but David was so eager, that he could not help catching his spirit.

"Oh, well," he said at last. "I suppose I could try; but you mustn't blame me if I make a mess of it."

"You won't! You won't! I guess we'll surprise them. I know every word for you to say."

David danced about till the dishes rattled.

Dan Martin wrote a letter to their good neighbors, telling them all about David, and how he was going home to his father and mother.

"We can mail that tomorrow when we take the train," he explained.

"We will just say we are going on a Christmas trip, and we'll leave the key with them, so they can look after the cabin while we are gone."

"Yes," said David, "and tell them that I am coming back next summer, and every summer, as long as I live. I will go fishing and swimming, and we will pick tons of blueberries. This home will be just perfect for a summer cottage in vacation."

The boy glowed at the thought.

"I'll show Mr. Owen what I can pick next year. I do my stint every time now, don't I?"

Dan Martin caught the lad up in his

arms, just as he had that summer day when he met him under the great elm tree by the aqueduct.

“Yes siree!” he laughed. “You do know what you can chew now, and when you bite it off, you chew it fine. Owen told me yesterday that you could haul almost as much wood as he could.”

David swelled with pride, as he got ready for bed, and looked at his strong arms, still brown from the summer sun.

To know that Owen had praised him for the work he did, filled him with joy, because Owen never gave praise where it was not fully earned.

CHAPTER XXII

GOODBY TO RABBIT HOLLOW

The next morning David was half wild with joy. He could hardly touch his breakfast, and danced about, piling wood, and doing errands here and there.

Doctor Grindle came in right after breakfast. He tapped Dan Martin's chest, and listened while he breathed.

"Oh, I guess you are not hurt a bit," he said. "I don't see how you stayed in that boiler room with no more harm than that."

"I lay flat on the floor. The steam and smoke were above me," replied Dan Martin.

"Well, you're all right now." The Doctor began to button up his coat.

"If you'll say what the bill is, I will pay you right now," said Dan Martin.

"Bill? There won't be any bill for this. Every time you put out a fire, I'll agree to attend you free, Dan. It won't cost you a cent."

So he drove away, leaving a Merry Christmas behind him.

They were going on the noon train, and the morning was filled with busy preparations.

"I'll go down to the train with you," said Owen. "You are a lucky kid to go to Boston. I wish I could go."

"You will be going, before long, see if you don't," replied David, almost bursting with his secret.

He planned to invite Owen down to see him, very, very soon. His head was so full of plans it fairly ached.

The iron bed was taken apart once more, while David was over at the

Collins home. Dan Martin took out two rolls of bills, one from each hollow rod. One roll he wrapped in a bit of paper. The other he put in his large leather pocket-book.

The farewells were said, and they marched down the road to the village. David, dressed in his new suit, with a warm overcoat that Dan Martin had bought for him, looked as neat as any boy in town.

He had grown so much since summer, that he seemed almost twice as large, in his winter coat.

As they went down toward the station, Wendell Brown came out of his store.

“Wait a minute,” he called. “Where are you going?”

“We are going to Boston for a visit,” replied Dan Martin.

“Well, I’m glad I saw you. Hold on

a minute; you have lots of time for the train. Wait right here."

He went into the store, and returned with a leather purse.

"We had a meeting at Masonic Hall last night," he said. "A good many of us had children in that school. We don't like to think what might have happened if you had not been there with that hose.

"You stopped the fire before it got started. We all wanted to thank you, so we took up a little collection.

"It is in this purse. I was going to take it up to your house, with some things for your Christmas dinner, but if you are going away, I guess I had better give it to you now."

He held out the purse.

Dan Martin drew back.

"I didn't do it for money."

"You're just right, you didn't!

People who do things for money, don't do things like that. But this is to thank you, Dan, not to pay you. The boys would all feel hurt if you refused to take it."

So Dan Martin thanked him and took the purse.

When they were safe on the train, he opened the purse and counted the money that he found inside.

"Thirty-six dollars," he said. "I feel just like a millionaire. We are rich, Davie. We are rich men."

Dan Martin put the purse into a handbag, and took out the lunch they had packed in the little cabin.

As the train flew on, past fields, and lakes, and rivers, and hills, they ate their lunch, and looked out at the scenes they were passing.

But David ate little, and paid small attention to the winter scenes. His

mind was filled with one great thought.

He was going home, home to Mother, home to Father, home to Chum. As for that bar of laundry soap, he wondered why he could have been so afraid. He laughed when he remembered how terrible it seemed. He would just like to see Mary try to make him eat soap now. Let her try it once.

"Oh, it will be just great!" he whispered, hugging the quiet man beside him. "You won't forget a word, and it will be just like a book."

"I don't know, Davie," he replied. "I wish you would let me off."

"No sir! It is as easy as eating pie. You just wait."

Dan Martin smiled, and settled back, holding the lad's hand in his, while the train flew on and on to the big city.

CHAPTER XXIII

I AM SANTA CLAUS

In a big house on a pleasant street in Newton, that evening, all was still except in the library. There a man and a woman were sitting before an open fire, that dimly lighted the room.

Near the blaze a Boston terrier lay, with his head between his paws.

The sun had set, and darkness was coming, to drive the clear, cold light away; for it was Christmas Eve, and Santa could not start till all was dark and quiet in the world.

The man rose, and looked out.

Lights glimmered here and there in scattered windows. Red lights burned on porches, to celebrate the holiday.

"I suppose we must do our share," he said, and he turned on the light above the porch.

"Yes," said his wife. "Hope must not walk in shadows. If we hope always, we must light the path, so hope may not be lost."

She went to the mantel above the fire, and looked at the picture of a boy.

The eyes in the picture were large and soft, like those of the woman who stood before him. His forehead, also, was broad and full, like hers.

But his mouth and chin were set and firm, like those of the man who came to stand beside her.

For some moments they stood there in silence, looking at the picture.

The dog got up and put his paws on the man's knee, as if he wanted to see the picture, also.

At that moment a step sounded on

the porch. The step was heavy and uncertain on the frosty boards.

The dog barked, and ran to the door.

"Here, Chum, come back!" ordered the man. "Come back and lie down."

Chum paid no attention. He barked furiously. He scratched at the door, and growled.

"What ails that dog? Here, come here, sir!"

The man's voice made Chum listen at last. He turned back, and looked at his master, who opened the door into the dark dining-room.

"Go in there," he ordered, and he shut the door on poor Chum, just as the bell rang in the hall.

When he opened the door, he started back in surprise.

There stood Santa himself, with a great sack upon his back.

He had a red suit, trimmed with fur,

and a long white beard. His red cap, also trimmed with fur, was pushed down over his eyes, so his face could hardly be seen.

Santa walked straight into the house, bag and all, without saying a word.

The man, thinking some neighbor had come to drive the shadows from their fireside, shut the door behind him.

Santa stopped right in the middle of the library floor, in front of the woman, who had turned to face him.

"Ahem!" he said. "Ahem! I am Santa Claus." Then he paused.

"So I see," said the man.

"Yes, I am Santa Claus. I have come—I have come to bring your Christmas gift."

Santa swallowed and took a deep breath, as if the words came hard.

"Yes," he began again. "I am Santa. I am Santa Claus."

He felt a kick in the back.

The woman saw the bag move.

Feeling the kick, Santa gasped, and continued:

“What thing you want most in all the world, that—that shall you have.”

The woman turned pale, and put her hand over her heart, but stood bravely upright, holding her husband's arm.

“It is very kind of you, old chap,” the man hastily put in, “but I fear you don't understand.”

“Yes, yes. I understand. I do understand,” replied Santa quickly. Then he hesitated.

Again he felt a sharp kick in the back. A voice whispered:

“Lady, tell me your desire. What do you love and wish for most?”

The whisper sounded through the room.

The woman turned.

"I can't stand it," she said. "You explain to him, Robert. He doesn't know. He doesn't know."

Quickly she walked to the door of the dining room.

"No, stop, stop!" came the voice from the bag.

She had opened the door.

Out rushed Mr. Chum, and bounded straight at Santa.

With yelps and barks he jumped up to the bag, and tore at it with his teeth.

"Stop that, Chum! Stop it. Let me out! Let me out!" came the voice from the bag.

The man bent forward to pull Chum away from Santa Claus.

The woman turned in the doorway, and stared at the bag. A rosy flush replaced the pallor of her cheeks, and she pressed her hands close over her heart.

With a twist of his body, Santa let the great sack slide to the floor.

The mouth of the bag opened, and a boy crawled out.

With one frantic struggle, Chum broke his collar, and rushed upon the boy.

But the lad showed no fear. He seized him in his arms, while the dog lapped his face with eager whines.

The real Santa himself, straight from his home in the frozen North, could not have caused a greater surprise.

This Santa seemed very timid. He moved back a step, and stood, with downcast eyes, his fur cap and wig all twisted by the bag he had put down from his back.

The man looked at the boy on the floor. He started forward. Then he stopped. He noticed the coat, and the suit. This boy seemed ten or twelve years old.



Chum rushed upon the boy

“Who are you?” he asked.

The boy looked up. It was his turn to be surprised.

His brown eyes opened wide, and his chin dropped.

He turned to the woman and cried:

“Mother, don’t YOU know me?”

The woman stood still a moment. The pallor had come again. The hands clutched more closely over her heart. Then her eyes closed, and she began to sway.

In a second the man was beside her, helping her into a big chair.

“I’ll be all right. I’ll be all right, in just a minute,” she whispered.

When she opened her eyes again the boy was in her lap, with his arms about her neck.

“Alden,” she whispered, “is it really you?”

For answer the lad only snuggled

closer, and laid his face against her soft white cheek.

As he put up his arm, to hold her tight, she saw a white scar on the back of the strong brown hand.

She looked at the man and smiled, as she showed him the scar.

He took the hand, and leaned down to kiss the boy.

“Alden, Alden!” he said. “We have looked for you the whole world over. Where did you hide yourself?”

“Why,” answered Alden. “I was living with him. That’s Dan Martin.”

CHAPTER XXIV

JUST AS DAVID PLANNED

Mr. Baker helped Dan Martin take off his Santa Claus suit, and made him sit down by the fire, while Alden told his story.

Just as he was beginning, he stopped suddenly, and asked:

“Is Mary here?”

“No, dear,” replied his mother. “The servants all went long ago. I couldn’t bear to have them about the place after you had gone.”

A look of relief came to Alden’s face, as he went on to tell how he longed to get out of the yard, to pick berries, and go swimming.

Then he told about the soap Mary

said she would make him eat, and how frightened he was, as he ran away.

“How did your shoes get down by the river?” asked his father. “Some people were sure you were drowned.”

“Oh, they hurt my feet, so I left them when I was through wading,” he replied.

The story of how he met Dan Martin, and how the man thought Alden was his boy, was soon told.

“I didn’t mean any harm,” said Dan Martin. “You see, my boy had just died in the hospital. He was all I had left, and it turned my head.

“When I saw this lad on the path, I thought it must be my boy come back to me again. I didn’t mean any harm. I am very sorry.”

“Ah, your poor boy! I was here that day when the dogs were fighting. I tried to get him to stay, so we might

wash him, and give him proper care; but he ran off in spite of us. Poor little lad!"

Mrs. Baker kissed the brown head on her breast, as she spoke. She knew what it was to be without a boy.

"Well," said Mr. Baker, to Dan Martin, when the stories were told, and all their questions had been asked and answered, "I suppose we ought not to keep you any longer. You will wish to be going."

"Yes, sir," replied Dan Martin, rising to his feet, "I must be going."

As he spoke, he looked at Alden, as a father would look at a boy he was to lose forever. For Dan Martin, this was the end.

"Going? Going?" called Alden, getting down from his mother's lap. "Where are you going?"

"Why, Davie," replied the man,

trying to appear brave and calm, "I'm going; just going. Don't fret about me. I'll be all right."

"You are not going. You promised you would stay here with me. He can't go, Mother. He mustn't go. He promised he would stay."

Alden turned again to his mother, as Dan Martin began to pick up his things.

"Tell him he must stay, Mother. Tell him he is going to live here with me and never go away."

"But, Alden, dear, he would not want to stay here with us. He must live with his own folks."

"He hasn't any own folks. I am all he has in the world. He does want to stay here, don't you, Dan Martin?"

Alden went to the man, and seized his big, rough, clean hand.

"Don't you want to stay with me?"

Dan Martin tried to answer, but

failed. At the sight of his face, Mrs. Baker turned away.

"Alden, dear, it doesn't seem—"

Mr. Baker started to speak, but Alden broke in.

"Oh, I know! You are afraid it will cost too much. You needn't be afraid. We can earn lots of money.

"I can earn my living, can't I, Dan? If you don't believe it, you can just feel my muscle."

Alden went to his father and doubled up his arm.

"Oh!" said Dan Martin, suddenly. "That reminds me. I have all your money here in my pocket, Davie. I almost forgot it."

He drew from his pocket a roll of bills, done up in paper.

"Here it is, Davie, thirty-two dollars. You earned every cent of it."

"There," exclaimed Alden, thrusting

it into his father's hand. "I can earn a lot more beside that. You see, if Dan Martin stays, I can go with him to pick berries, and fish, and do lots of things to earn money."

"I thought, if I ever had a boy again, I would go fishing with him myself," replied his father.

Mr. Baker held the roll of money, and the little hand that grasped it.

Alden's eyes danced with joy and excitement.

"Oh!" he cried. "Then we can all go together. Dan Martin knows all the best places everywhere, and he can take care of automobiles, and run boilers, and put out fires, and—everything."

Alden danced about the floor, while Chum, who had been quiet for a while, jumped up and tried to lick his face.

The father and mother looked at

each other, as if speaking with their eyes. Mrs. Baker nodded.

"It is true that I need a man about the place," said Mr. Baker to Dan Martin. "Do you really understand cars and engines?"

"Yes, sir, I get along very well with them," replied the man.

"Would you really like to stay here with Alden?"

"He is all I had in the world, that I cared for."

The look that he gave the lad, who stood before him, told much more than the quiet, modest tones.

"There, didn't I tell you? Of course you are going to stay here with me.

"You'll see how much he can do. I guess you'll be glad we came back, after we have been here a little while."

The father looked at his boy, who had grown tall and straight, even in the

few months he had been away. He was clean, and well, and strong.

There was a little smile on his face as he laid his hand on the thick brown hair, and said:

“Yes, Alden, I think we really shall be glad that you came back.”





